Between a rock and a hard place: exploring the views and accounts of undergraduate student writers in a consumer-led Higher Education system

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Abstract

This thesis problematizes the student-as-consumer mantra from the perspective of students' academic writing. It is beginning to be argued that a consumer-led higher education sector reducing the value of a degree to employability credentials leaves little space for considering variant and diverse approaches to higher educational learning. The premise of this thesis is that this applies to the business of student writing, in ways that are under-discussed.

Academic literacies theory argues that changes in Higher Education shapes significantly writing and assessment practices in ways that can be applied to consider student writing in a consumer-led and high-fee Higher Education system. This thesis uses Academic Literacies theory along with Thesen's notion of 'the tilting point' in relation to 'voice' to explore how far and in what ways students' understanding of their writing is perceived as a matter of developing disciplinary understanding and identity or amassing capital in the form of a qualification, and how students attempt to reconcile these divergent narratives.

The thesis explores these issues through a small-scale qualitative study at a pre-1992 university, drawing on 20 semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students. It applies Thematic Network Data Analysis to reveal ways in which this process is felt as a site of both compliance and resistance, containing both certainties and trepidations. Through this analysis, the thesis also reveals ways that risk and power are intricately involved in the way these students attempt to navigate writing.

Acronyms

UK	United Kingdom
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institute
NSS	National Student Survey
DLHE	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education
WAC	Writing across the curriculum
WiD	Writing in the disciplines
EAL	English as another language
L2	Second language learners
US	United States
COP	Communities of Practice
BERA	British Educational Research Association
RQs	Research questions

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Problem

My thesis explores the multi-faceted tensions in student writing today. Specifically, it explores, through semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students, how student writing 'fits' into today's logic of UK Higher Education. On the one hand, Higher Education traditionally promotes disciplinary discovery and the exploration and advancement of knowledge. On the other hand, UK Higher Education is being increasingly promoted on the basis of individualised human capital gains (Hannon, Faas and O'Sullivan 2018). All the while, in the UK, writing continues to be a primary way to assess student learning (Baker 2017; Baker 2013; Lillis 2006) and is frequently, if not entirely, adopted as a mode of assessment across many disciplines (Hindley and Clughen 2018; Lillis 2006). Student writing therefore is at the epicentre of these tensions, providing opportunities for the deepening of disciplinary knowledge but also acting as a 'gateway' to amassing capital in the form of a 'qualification'.

But there's another way of seeing this thesis. Writing is potentially trapping for students in today's UK Higher Education climate. As narratives around human capital become increasingly central in the way that universities promote their value (Murgescu, Proteasa and Sadlak 2018), the purpose of writing is progressively defined by grade attainment (McMorran, Ragupathi and Lou 2017). But the narratives that place an emphasis on what is to be gained say very little about what might be lost, such as: the expanding of horizons, the freedom to explore, discovery, innovation, creativity and developing a new way of thinking

about the world. An alternative viewpoint explored within this thesis is that the consumer logic underpinning employability narratives means that students may find themselves cornered between a rock and hard place. Writing in ways that are predominantly geared towards grade attainment is likely to be restrictive and stressful; not to mention pervasive as each grade signals what might be achieved in a degree classification overall (Simonite 2000). But not paying enough attention to grades could risk one's investment of time, money and effort leading to the potential inability to make it in a competitive world. Writing matters, and although students are frequently referred to as consumers (Williams 2013), their experiences of being in a high stakes consumer-led Higher Education is less frequently questioned (Raaper 2018).

The lens of student writing offers a way to explore these types of questions. Stuck between a rock and a hard place, student writers must weigh up between writing for grade gain sake or risking failure and its corollary effects. This thesis explores these potential predicaments and contributes an understanding of what is actually happening in relation to undergraduate students based on their reported views and accounts of writing in three ways. First, this exploration provides policy-makers with an updated view of some of the ways that students feel and think about writing in ways that define their wider experiences of learning within Higher Education. Secondly, this thesis also contributes to the development of a more nuanced understanding of student writing that might be of use to the professional and academic staff teams that deal with learning development. To this end, Thesen's notion of a 'tilting point' is used as a way to understand 'voice' in writing, in ways to develop Academic Literacies theory in the context of a highly marketised Higher

Education system. Finally, this thesis provides what might be of interest to sociologists through the analysis of student views and accounts of writing that draw from notions of risk.

All of this is important because the learning environment contributes to how learning is experienced (Kember and Leung 1998). Today student writing occurs in an era of undergraduate study that is characterised by market forces across the UK (Jones, Sutcliffe, Bragg and Harris 2016), and for England in particular, including relatively high tuition fees (Jones 2016; Jones 2010). Students are increasingly invited to think about the value of their degrees in terms of the potential future benefits that they bestow (Ingleby 2015). Promises made by Higher Education establishments are often future-orientated and involve locating the value of Higher Education on what will be gained from Higher Education in a student's future life (Holdsworth and Quinn 2010; Smith and Bath 2006). The emphasis on future benefits implies that the value of Higher Education is not found *during* the degree but is something that *follows on* from it.

The value of Higher Education as something that is gained after study means that degree courses are being viewed and talked about as a transition to something better (Barton, Bates and O'Donovan 2017; Haywood, Jenkins and Molesworth 2011). Studying to learn is less likely to be viewed as being either *the point* of doing a degree or *the value* of doing a degree. The repositioning of a degree's value raises questions about the nature of the way that students come to experience and understand Higher Education (Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017). For example, how is Higher Education viewed and accounted for by the students who are in a system that promotes itself as a type of precursor to the real value and benefits of having a degree? And might degrees become something to be endured or to 'get

through' if their value is traded against potential benefits? What does this mean for student writing in a climate that ushers the value and benefits of study to a place that is perpetually out-of-reach?

Placing the value of a degree on employability emphasises the desirability of high grades in ways that makes assessment an almost exclusive concern for students (Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017). The centrality of assessment has the propensity to crowd out desires to learn more deeply and study a discipline in order to develop a strong knowledge base (Carless 2007). Counterintuitively, student drive to do well in assessment may be conflated with a drive to do well in learning (Denscombe 2004). Therefore, assessment-driven approaches may be seen as the taken-for-granted approach for being a 'good' student and for being a 'good' university. But when students are encouraged to write in ways that are assessment driven, we might want to also ask to what extent are students *discouraged* to write in ways for disciplinary discovery and personal transformation, and what sort of Higher Education sector might this lead to?

When disciplinary discovery matters less, accruing a degree qualification matters more. The UK graduate job marketplace is promoted as competitive, but worthwhile (Harvey 2000). But the perceived need to achieve in writing to secure future success does not always square neatly with the ability to do well academically (Svensson and Wood 2007). Students who want to achieve certain grades might find that this is difficult to do. Not being able to achieve the grades that hopes are pinned on is inherently *unsatisfying* and therefore problematic for Higher Education quality measures that are based on satisfaction scores. Evidently, assessment and feedback scores are lower compared with other sections of the

National Student Survey and therefore pose specific concerns for HEIs (Lynam and Cachia 2018; Pitt and Norton 2017). By extension, writing - as the cornerstone of many assessment types - and how to support writing remains a key concern (Baker 2017).

More awareness surrounding the difficulties students may face in writing has fuelled pedagogical changes that aim to make explicit the implicit rules of academic writing (Hunter and Docherty 2011). In pedagogical terms, the use of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assignment briefs have now become commonplace to help students understand what is required of them in written assignments (Fulford 2016; Crook, Gross and Dymott 2006). Pastorally, student support has increased over the last twenty years and greater emphasis is placed upon central services that can help with writing (Barkas 2011). In addition, there has been a growing interest in scholarly research around the issue of student writing and efforts in research have made significant gains in the way bodies of work have successfully uncovered hidden power relations, revealed implicit identity work, and articulated the social practices subsumed in academic writing (Lea and Street 1998; Baynham 2000; Lillis 2006).

However, problems with student writing still plague the academy (French 2018). The task of making the implicit explicit has been a hard nut to crack (Lea 2004). Alternative ways to provide even more writing support are being sought: use of exemplars (To and Carless 2016), use of writing frames (Fulford 2009) and discrete study skills modules (Huskin 2016), and sometimes more radical, such as doing away with traditional dissertations in the final year of study (Byrom and Aiken 2014). The drive to make changes to practice implies that it is the practice that is wrong rather than how the wider context might have a part to play in

the way assessment, and by extension, student writing, is framed. The emphasis placed on changing practice and working cultures also assumes that students have adopted wholesale the consumer role and care not for deep disciplinary learning that Higher Education can otherwise offer.

Across the UK, student feedback is gleaned via module and course evaluations that ask students to rate the package that they have bought into (Sabri 2013). These types of questionnaires contain little insight into what students might prefer and what they would like to be able to value (Hamshire *et al* 2017). The emphasis is instead placed on measurable learning outcomes and not 'felt outcomes' (Lizzio, Wilson and Simons 2002: 28). Thus, the more 'global evaluations of accomplishment' (Lizzio *et al* 2002: 28) are overlooked when gaging student satisfaction (Dean and Gibbs 2015). Without much insight into how students might see their accomplishments *in the round*, we are missing a piece of the puzzle. It is unclear how far and in what ways assessment pushes out other virtues of Higher Education from the student point of view. Neither is it clear if more and more guidance on assessment tasks is helpful. It is also uncertain whether or not, and to what extent, students want assessment to be the be-all and end-all of Higher Education. These are unexplored questions to pose to our student writers who find themselves located within a Higher Education sector that emphasises more and more the future value of having a degree. Additionally, without having a fuller insight into what students would like from Higher Education, practitioners may be asked to instigate changes for little gain (Dean and Gibbs 2015).

1.2 My own professional insights and practitioner interest in student writing

My interest in the topic of student writing is longstanding. It originates from a role in study skills provision that has morphed into my current position as a lecturer with a specific responsibility for developing student academic practice. In my professional capacity, I have seen students become increasingly concerned with their writing abilities, and a growing preoccupation with reaching particular grades in assignment work (which is frequently attained via writing). These types of worries appear to have coincided at a time when tuition fees are rising in England, economic outlooks remain uncertain nationally, and universities highlight more the prosperity and employment gains of 'doing' a degree.

Although of course, there have always been disciplinary interest and expertise in writing, beyond such pockets, student writing has been broadly understood as something that is rather pedestrian. But increasingly, over the last 20 years, student writing is becoming to be understood more widely as a complex set of practices with many hidden depths (Good 2015; Lea and Street 1998;). For student writers, the need to achieve highly whilst working out the enigmas of academic writing are complicated further by individual differences in motivation and aspiration, as well as varying levels of competence that different students bring with them to the academy (Callinan, van der Zee and Wilson 2018). However, whilst efforts have been concentrated to find out why some students struggle in writing, and to uncover the flaws in writing support provision (Lea and Street 1998; Wingate 2015), less is known about how students might do well in writing, how successful students account for their own writing, and what positive views and experiences about writing students may hold and have. And yet, gaining an understanding of what works well for some students, as part

of exploring the more positive aspects of writing, may offer insights that help other students and practitioners involved in the supporting of student writing.

My thesis explores these types of predicaments, of being stuck between a rock and a hard place, through the exploration of student views and accounts bound by a consumer-led Higher Education sector. My research aim is: ***to explore how student writing is understood, viewed and experienced by student writers within the varying and sometimes competing narratives of Higher Education in a consumer-led Higher Education sector.*** Or to put it in lay terms: what is it like to study in today's consumer-led Higher Education system as a student writer? In order to help explore my research aim, my research is guided by the following research questions:

- How do student writers negotiate the longstanding ethos of discovery and knowledge advancement against the newer versions of Higher Education endorsing individual gain?
- How do student writers in terms of the way they view, experience and approach writing reconcile differing and sometimes competing narratives?
- And, how do students negotiate the difficulties in writing *but also* what do they see as the pleasures and privileges, if any, in writing?

Exploring student writing as framed by a consumer-led Higher education sector offers me the opportunity to develop an enriched sense of what student writing feels like for students in the current climatic conditions. Such an exploration contributes also a useful insight for members of the academic community who spend some of their time devoted to supporting

student writers, both in general and in preparing them for assignments. Similarly, support staff and academic-related staff may also benefit from having specific insight around how writing is experienced in a high-stakes, high cost Higher Education system, so that writing support is convened with additional sensitivity to the more nuanced ways in which writing is viewed, experienced and approached by the undergraduate student body.

Next, I outline the policy context of contemporary UK Higher Education to explore the conditions that frame student writing. Specifically, I consider how policy initiatives with economic imperatives influence undergraduate student experiences and perceptions of writing. After which, I include a brief summary of the Widening Participation agenda in order to trace how student populations have diversified in ways that have helped to table the issue of student writing within Higher Education. I will also consider how the inception of widening participation was originally articulated as a social justice venture, but how matters of social inequality are increasingly forgotten in light of the newer narratives of employability. The final section of chapter 1 will close with a discussion about the ways in which the consumer model of Higher Education increasingly contributes to a new type of 'discourse of derision' (Leathwood & O'Connell 2003: 600).

1.3 The Policy Context of Higher Education

The foregrounding of employability, capital acquisition and grade accruement in a broader climate of austerity and economic and political uncertainties supplies an emerging backdrop for undergraduate student writers. The feel and conditions of Higher Education are very

different today compared to just 20 years previously. The Dearing Report in 1997 identified students as customers of the Higher Education system (Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017). Post Dearing , tuition fees in England were introduced in 1998 and have since doubled, twice, following the Browne Review of 2010 (Burgess, Senior and Moores 2018). Grants have dwindled (Grove 2016) and more widely, living costs have risen and wages haven't kept up. The UK lingers on in a seemingly unending recession and more uncertainty lies on the horizon with an imminent Brexit ahead. Furthermore, food banks, zero-contract employment contracts, the 'gig' economy and out-of-reach housing prices for many young people are some examples that contribute to the uncertain characteristics of modern life (Hepp 2017). Getting a degree and the employability narratives of Higher Education have never mattered more for so many young people. Degrees are showcased as a way to avoid many of the social ills that plague modern life in the UK today (Clarke 2018).

I previously suggested that the more dominant discourses of employability replaces the value of Higher Education in terms of future (and unknown) gains. Another knock-on effect of endorsing the value of Higher Education as a 'graduate premium' (Davies, Qiu and Davies 2014: 804) is how it transports education from a societal good to an individual good. Higher Education promises access to individual prosperity via graduateness operating as a capital for students to eventually exchange within the graduate job marketplace (Clarke 2018). The Higher Education sector regularly speaks of 'Knowledge transfer', 'employability skills' and 'graduate attributes'. These articulations place particular emphasis upon individual gain (Williams 2017). Promoting the economic benefits of Higher Education study relocates HEIs to a place of 'financial investment' (Williams 2013: 4). In turn, students are expected and encouraged to seek value for money in the returns that they are likely to get in their future

employment (Brooks 2018A; Brooks 2018B). The addition of University courses into the Consumer Rights Act 2015 cements Higher Education as an asset that can be bought (Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017). The Office for Students represents student consumer rights, and particular metrics such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) are cast in order to measure and quantify student satisfaction (Burgess, Senior and Moores 2018). These surveys aim to derive a proxy measure for ascertaining course value (Jungblut, Vukasovic and Stensaker 2015; Douglas, Douglas, McClalland and Davies 2015; Woodall, Hiller and Resnick 2014). However, reducing the worth of a degree course to student perceptions of value for money downplays the emancipatory aspects of education (Biesta 2010; Biesta 2013), so that whatever benefits might be gained from Higher Education *beyond* individualised capital gains are almost rendered invisible. Additionally, emphasis placed on human capital cloaks what universities have to offer as a social and public good (Garlick 2014). Policy understandings of what Higher Education does in society are therefore increasingly based on narrowed definitions of value: how students feel about value-for-money, and how successful universities have been in enabling students to access graduate work.

The narrowing view of Higher Education value has seen HEIs converting to more of a service approach to education that positions students as the customer base (Williams 2013). The relationship between student and Higher Education is increasingly being understood as a contractual one (Tomlinson 2018). Student involvement in Higher Education is based upon the principles of investment, the promise of material goods and the assurances of general prosperity in the future (Ng and Forbes 2009). Higher Education must deliver. But the cost

for Higher Education are the risks of being cornered into Freire's (1970) system of 'banking', in which the function of education becomes 'an act of depositing' (Freire 1970: 53).

Education used as a means to acquire capital by its 'users' occupies much room in contemporary education policy (Farhat 2014). Most dominantly, the idea of human capital contributes to the 'economic discourse' (Stehr 2001: 49) that supports the current ideological trends in what education is for and how it is of benefit to others. Human capital can be understood as an 'investment explanation' (Davies, Qiu and Davies 2014: 807) undertook to achieve a 'graduate premium' (*ibid* 2014: 804) – that is, for the time, money and effort spent in education there is an anticipation of returns in good future income and employment prospects. The notion of human capital therefore relies on the assumption that 'the better educated a person is, the more productive they are likely to be, for which they will earn a higher income' (Lauder 2015: 491). In other words, human capital gains from getting a degree are promoted on the basis that there is a straightforward correlation between investing in Higher Education and securing future economic prosperity at the level of the individual (Burke 2016).

The urge to obtain capital in relation to Higher Education has been mapped out using two different types of motivations by Jungblut, Vukasovic and Stensaker (2015). They propose that when the drive to obtain Academic Capital is present, motivations are 'instrumental' in nature. In this sense, students are mainly incentivized by the transactional benefits of possessing a degree. Instrumental motivation is therefore quite distinct from what they refer to as 'expressive motivation', that describes the way that students might be spurred onto learn (and to write) based upon disciplinary interests. Another way of viewing what I

am calling the rock and the hard place within student writing can be gleaned from what Fromm refers to as 'having' and as 'being' (cited in Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion 2009: 280). Fromm's 'having' is a reductive version of what education offers students, whilst Fromm's 'being' is meant as something much more emancipatory. Molesworth *et al* argue how Universities have increasingly promoted the virtues of 'having' degrees and have 'adopted with increasing vigour, an orientation that has reduced a degree to an outlay that appears to secure future material affluence rather than as an investment of the self' (2009: 280). Similar concerns are raised in relation to the notion of human capital in which emphasis is placed on what graduates are 'good at' rather than what they are 'good for' and hence, overlooking the benefits of having a graduate workforce that can tackle social justice through active citizenship (Garlick 2014).

1.4 Consumer Society versus Risk Society

The purpose of HE has become strongly linked to individual prosperity (Tomlinson 2018). Degrees are frequently discussed as employability aids that can successfully catapult individuals into the labour market in a competitive and individualised world (Robinson 2012). The English tuition rate of £9000 'plus' in annual fees, one of the highest in the world (Jones 2016), further transports the Higher Education sector into a land of business transaction. Education becomes a *financial* investment for the future for which students must assume 'systematic indebtedness' (Harrison, Chudry, Waller and Hatt 2015: 86). The (unknown) outcome of the degree and its (unknown) future worth can be seen as a set of uncertainties that cast a shadow over Higher Education study for undergraduate students. Students are being asked to accept very high amounts of debt that have strong potential to

create feelings of unease and anxiety (Vigurs, Jones, Everitt and Harris 2018). The unknown future element of HE study juxtaposed with a high price tag frames Higher Education as a high stakes, high cost venture.

Whilst the literature used to capture the individual investment nature of Higher Education often takes a consumer view of Higher Education (Tomlinson 2017), an alternative standpoint can be gained using Beck's (1992) 'risk' thinking. What Beck offers, and what the consumer view perhaps inadequately captures, is recognition of the influencing nature of the uncertain times within which Higher Education takes place. In other words, the raised tuition fees, the bleak economic outlook, the competitive graduate job market and rising living costs that surround, and in some ways shape, the broader Higher Education context. Beck (1992) provides an all-encompassing view of risk by understanding society, and the social experiences created within it, as occurring in relation to positions of risk (Mythen 2004; Rose 2000). According to Beck's view, the structural influences of social class positions in modern society are not gone *per se,* but they no longer provide a beacon to illuminate a clear cut route through life (Beck 2007; Zinn 2008; Sorenson and Chistiansen 2013). Subsequently, Beck proposes his individualization thesis as a way to describe how risk plays out as part of the uncertainties of modern everyday life (Denney 2005; McGuigan 2006). In Beck's 'Risk Society' people are required to make constant choices relating to their lives having sole responsibility for these choices and thus the burden, or 'strain' (Illeris 2014: 63), of making the right choice at the right time (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1999; Evans 2007). As a result, a sense of risk is a characteristic of modern life and an ever-pervasive 'strain' (Illeris 2014: 63).

The contradictory tensions framing today's student experience can be seen as an example of the ways Beck's individualization thesis has been widely criticized for overstating agency (Woodman 2009; Kelly 2001; Mythen 2004). However, Beck's views on agency have been prone to some overinterpretation (Woodman 2009). Beck discusses at length how *it is the conditions of the Risk Society* that makes individuals within modern society bear the burden of responsibility for their own decision-making *despite* the social conditions that they find themselves in. It is not social class that is disappearing but social class consciousness (Roberts 2012). Beck also recognizes how, in the context of his '*do-it-yourself biography*', the 'word 'decisions' is too grandiose' (Beck 1992: 135). Therefore, Beck does offer some parameters around agency and later refines his terminology to 'a risk biography' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 48).

Beck's view of risk with specific reference to the individualization thesis is a useful and alternative way to think about students in today's Higher Education system. Whereas much past research has had a focus on risk in relation to specific and marginal groups (*see* Archer and Hutchings 2000; Brine and Waller 2004; Chipperfield 2013; Reay 2001, Reay 2003) newer research has been influenced by the notion of risk as something characteristic of Higher Education in broader terms (*see* McWilliam 2009; Thesen and Cooper 2014). Risk as all-encompassing rather than demographically pertinent means that risk has the potential to impact upon *any* student in the high stakes, high climate Higher Education system (Wilkins, Shams and Huisman 2013). Students venturing through an expensive Higher Education system that promotes itself upon consumer logic and employability narratives are subjected to the idea of risk in the same way that they are subjected to the idea of consumerism. The difference between the two ways of viewing Higher Education is in the ability to capture the

affective nature of 'strain' that students feel in the current climatic conditions. Furthermore, as writing is often at the gateway to either success or failure (Graal and Clark 2000), writing is also at the epicenter of the concerns that students have around failure and failing (Chipperfield 2013). Therefore, the notion of risk provides an additionality that is useful in helping to understand the more affective aspects of writing for assessment in the consumer view of Higher Education.

1.5 Widening participation and human capital

Underpinning the employability narratives of Higher Education is the assumption that all students undertaking undergraduate studies have common access to the advantages that Higher Education grants its participants. However, whilst Higher Education participation rates have grown, the extent to which social inequalities have been addressed by this expansion is much more uncertain (Donnelly 2016; Smith 2012). The expansion of the Higher Education sector in the UK is frequently linked to New Labour's Widening Participation agenda but arguably has roots in policy much predating this (Ross 2003). Widening participation, in this context, can be understood as 'the goal being to foster greater university participation among students from underrepresented social groups' (Archer 2007: 642). The Widening Participation agenda can also be seen as an attempt to cultivate well-rounded graduates in order for the UK to maintain a globally significant position on the world stage (Stevenson, Clegg & Lefever 2010). As such, it is linked to the renowned target of achieving a 50% participation rate for all 18-24 year olds by 2010 (Ball 2008; Leathwood & O'Connell 2003; Reay 2004; Stevenson, Clegg & Lefever 2010).

On the one hand, promoting the benefits that Higher Education qualifications bestow in relation to individual human capital can be seen as leverage in attracting students into the academy from non-traditional backgrounds. Therefore, the 'investment narratives' can make claims over achieving social mobility amongst poorer social groups in society (Davies and Williams 2001). On the other hand, the widening of access to Higher Education has been widely criticised for disproportionately benefiting the middle-classes (Donnelly 2018; Ball 2003; Reay, Davies, David & Ball 2001), and securing only a modest impact in narrowing social inequalities (Harrison and Waller 2018; Bibbings 2006; Leathwood & O'Connell 2003; Archer 2007; Harrison 2011). As such, the Widening Participation agenda has been criticised for being a paradoxical and contradictory social policy (Thompson 2008; Barr 2012). Even in the most up-to-date research, in what might be referred to as a post-widening participation era, social inequalities continue to persist in the wake of Higher Education expansion (Harrison and Waller 2018; Palfreyman and Tapper 2016). In particular, students from non-traditional backgrounds are less likely to access the more elite universities that confer a higher status and therefore infer a greater accomplishment (Riddell 2015). Accounts of this ilk problematize the assumption of meritocracy that is implicit within the 'investment explanation'. Higher Education does not provide equal access to the accumulation of human capital gains for all of its participants (Tarlau 2016).

As well as uncertainties to do with aiding equally the social mobility of its students, access to Higher Education poses additional problems for students in relation to the issue of debt. In the wake of the higher tuition fee regime in England, the financial risks associated with Higher Education participation are becoming increasingly difficult to mitigate (see Hinton-Smith 2016; Neill 2015) and the 'investment explanation' and employability narratives used

to promote the benefits of Higher Education fall short of acknowledging the ways in which the logic of investment returns does not map across easily onto all students (Vigurs, Jones, Everitt and Harris 2018). Higher Education to would-be and participating students alike does not always appear as a 'sweet deal'.

The 'investment explanation' of Higher Education 'worth' additionally fails to recognize the deeper meanings that people attach to Higher Education study. University is not always a decision that involves weighing up matter-of-factly the material rewards in the longer term. University participation is sacrificial because, for some students, studying for a degree means *losing* money and income (Archer and Hutchings 2000; Brine and Waller 2004). And university conjures a fear of failure for some student groups more than it does a straightforward pathway to access to capital gains (Archer and Hutchings 2000; Brine and Waller 2004; Reay 2001; Fuller 2014). The investment of Higher Education also includes broader incentives for some student groups (working class mature women in this case) such as giving back to society or enhancing the life chances of offspring (Reay 2003). What can be learnt from the complex ways in which individuals and groups come to understand the 'worth' of Higher Education – as gleaned from widening participation research over the last couple of decades - is that employability narratives may be one-dimensional. What Higher Education can provide and what Higher Education students want may not line up. In summary, the employability narratives and 'investment explanation' discourses understate the specific concerns of non-traditional students and overstate the potential straightforward nature of investment returns (Burke 2016; Wilton 2011).

1.6 Widening participation, student writing and the deficit model

The widening participation agenda tabled the issue of student writing much more centrally from the late nineties onwards. The matter of student writing appeared to provoke both negative and positive conversations. In some ways, talking about student writing in order to find ways to unlock the mysteries of writing was a helpful and positive move (Nesi and Gardner 2012). In other ways, talking about writing in relation to University students created a derogatory view of student writers (Lillis and Turner 2001). Non-traditional students who made it into the academy faced potential sneers about their basic competency levels with a particular focus on writing skills (Lillis & Turner 2001; Borg & Deane 2011). A 'discourse of derision' constructed the 'new student' as inferior to 'traditional' students as well as emblematic of a depleting quality within the academy brought about by widening participation (Leathwood & O'Connell 2003). The pathologising 'discourse of derision' allowed 'problems' to be located with the student and subsequently viewed new students as burdensome for the academy. In other words, non-traditional students were: 'welcomed into the academy by the rhetoric of widening participation, but at the same time denied an adequate participation by taken-for-granted assumptions about academic conventions' (Lillis & Turner 2001: 66).

Widening Participation has since changed from having a social welfare rationale to an economic competitive one (Palfreyman and Tapper 2014). The heightened emphasis upon degrees as a type of human capital positions degree courses as a product that students buy (Williams 2013). The consumer logic stimulates pressures for academic staff to ensure that all students succeed (Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017). The focus on academic staff and their

role in ensuring student success has increased workloads and added pressures sometimes at the expense of student and academic staff relations (Nicolescu 2009). Academic staff are criticized for not paying students enough attention in the right way at the right time (Hill, Lomas and MacGregor 2003). All the while, students are demonized for adopting more and more consumer-like tendencies in their dealings with the academy (Tomlinson 2014). One pressure point relating to staff and student relations can be seen in student writing.

New discourses of derision refer now to the 'student-as-consumer' mantra and brings new disgruntles about the way 'new' students operate in an increasingly marketised academy (Woodall, Hiller and Resnick 2014). Student behaviour is viewed as becoming framed by consumer logic because students are now more likely to perceive that they are buying their degrees (see Gabriel 2015 on the psychoanalysis of consumerism and the illusion of choice). There are concerns from within the academy that the consumer logic of Higher Education, for undergraduate students in particular, has a tendency to create a sense of entitlement amongst students (Nixon, Scullion and Hearn 2018). Furthermore, there are concerns from academic staff that a sense of entitlement amongst students leads to instrumentalist ways of learning (Naidoo, Shankar and Veer 2011; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). The student-as-consumer meme therefore tends to imply that the student in a consumer-led Higher Education system is in some ways inferior to the older and more authentic student of times gone by (as noted more concertedly in the US contexts via Knepp 2012; Boretz 2004). Hence, students become viewed as part of the problem when they seemingly start to view university as a private good and fail to understand its role as a social good (Delucchi and Korgen 2002). The age of social responsibility and contribution in the form of knowledge

advancement, and the desire to learn using 'expressive motivation' is compromised in order to make room for a consumer logic (Naidoo and Williams 2015).

A new discourse of derision around consumer students can be seen as something that is fundamentally connected to the matter of student writing. It is in the run-up to submissions for assignments, and the times following the release of grades, that behaviours most likely to be deemed as consumer-induced are displayed amongst some students. For example, a sense of entitlement might seem subsumed within student-driven questions such as: why did I get this mark? I worked so hard on my essay. Or: What do I need to do in this essay? What do you want to see? **Questions of this ilk are likely to rouse concerns because the inherent nature of such questions tends to sidestep disciplinary knowledge and target directly matters to do with the relationships between the student and academic staff.** As a result, the relationship becomes more contractual and service oriented – and therefore, not what it used to be (Nordstrom, Bartels and Bucy 2009). This is the rub of the consumer logic of Higher Education. The discipline comes second not *just* to the student but to *the happiness* of the student (Lewis 2006). And this is an underlying shift that comes to the fore in writing.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

The literature review places more focus upon the research that relates to student writing and student writing for assessment. As such, the literature review details the student writing environment in ways that explore how student writing is supported, how student

writers may be inclined to approach writing, and what other challenges and risks might exist in relation to the issue of student writing in today's UK Higher Education system.

The theoretical framework endeavours to unpack more the ways in which student writing can be understood as a social practice, drawing from Academic Literacies theory. The discussion will evolve to take into account new developments through an exploration of Thesen's contribution to the field substantively via the notions of risk and voice.

The methodology chapter deals with the theoretical underpinnings of my research as well as explicating the actual research process. Within this section, I introduce the students who I talked to via a series of participant profiles. I end the chapter by outlining the data analysis procedures undertaken.

The next three chapters discuss my data analysis. My first chapter deals with the opportunities and possibilities that students talked about in relation to writing. Using Thesen's notion of voice and centrifugal resources available to students, I consider student writing successes and opportunities that attune student writing to Fromm's 'being' mode as opposed to a 'having' mode.

The second data analysis chapter looks beyond the opportunities and possibilities to consider the times when writing is altogether more rigid and prescriptive. To do so, I refer to Thesen' s centripetal forces that tend to center voice in less agential ways. The discussion revolves around the ways in which students find these restrictions as difficult to resist and therefore leading to writing becoming stuck between a rock and a hard place.

The final data analysis chapter explores more fully the ways in which writing presents certain risks to student writers. The risks perceived by students are organised into three themes as a way to discuss the most pertinent challenges that students face in writing. The themes include: vagueness, staff variation and harsh markers. The chapter explores the ways these risks are discussed as connected to power, seen as fixable or understood as an inevitable part of writing.

The conclusion summarises the thesis and returns to the research aim and questions set out in the introduction. I outline the contribution my thesis makes to the field of student writing, as well discussing the limitations of the study, and the implications for future research and for practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter raised questions about the changing nature of the 'value' of Higher Education and the implications for students and student writing in a consumer-led system. Social policy was discussed to explore how employability narratives (capital accruement, future investment) are foregrounded at the possible expense of traditional notions of Higher Education value (discovery, knowledge and transformation), and the implications for writing within the contexts of these shifts. The discussion so far has scoped out the ways in which the broader policy context of Higher Education shapes and contributes to the writing environment for UK HE students. The next section will ask what the writing environment is like for student writers in terms of a) how student writing is supported within UK HEIs; b) how student writers approach writing within the UK HE sector and c) what challenges and risks are associated with student writing in UK universities today. In sum, a fuller picture of how student writing is understood and treated within the academy, and what is known about the way students view their writing experiences will be discussed.

2.2 Student writing and the writing environment

The first section of this chapter aims to establish a picture of the writing environment in terms of the way the academy supports student writers. Student writing in the UK can be understood as being supported explicitly via the provisioning of study skills and implicitly via learning and teaching discourses. Both forms of writing support can be thought of as, firstly,

a response to the widening participation agenda (Thomas 2002), and secondly, a response to the consumer-bound nature of Higher Education within which 'the student experience' is the barometer of learning and teaching quality (O'Sullivan and Cleary 2014). Efforts to support student writing within the academy are often high on the agenda due to lower scores in the Assessment and Feedback sections of the National Student Surveys (Pitt and Norton 2017; Agius and Wilkinson 2014; O'Sullivan and Cleary 2012). Writing, while not the only concern for assessment and feedback practices, can also stir up negative emotions such as anxiety and stress amongst student writers (Keranen and Munive 2012). These strains on students also inform student satisfaction and therefore writing continues to be an area of focus in helping to improve student experiences.

2.2.1 The problem with 'skills' and study skills provision

Apart from persons with a specific interest linked to their disciplinary expertise, writing is often viewed across the academy as the acquisition of writing skills (McVey 2008). Although difficult to execute, and to much extent arbitrary (Cameron 1995), writing skills are often thought of as 'basic' (Lea and street 1998). The technical 'know-how' of writing skills include the demonstration of 'Standard English' and surface-level features such as spelling, punctuation, organising information, making notes, interpreting questions, planning and developing an argument (MacMohan 2004). These are skills that undergraduate students are expected to bring with them when they start their degree courses and they are critical for academic success (Gettinger and Seibert 2002; Tait and Entwistle 1996).

But despite being seen as basic, skills issues can dominate the marking of work by offering what are easily identifiable mistakes that detract from what else the student writer may have accomplished (Hill 2011). Writing skills are therefore problematic in the sense that although they are considered basic, they are also critical for success and can count for much in the marking and grading of work.

But writing skills at the level of Higher Education are anything but basic. Issues with writing skills can be troubling for very experienced and established writers (Murray and Moore 2006). Writing involves the demonstration of complex learning through the successful execution of a series of 'complex skills' (Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson and Reddy 2006). The change in language from 'generic' to 'complex' captures more fully the demanding skills that are required of students during writing as part of undergraduate study. Using 'complex skills', as opposed to (or in addition to) 'generic skills', presupposes a layer of complexity not always acknowledged as part and parcel of writing.

But however 'skills' are badged, they can still cause issues for student writers. Learning to write in academic contexts involves understanding the potential contradictions subsumed in writing guidance (Rai 2004). For example, students may be advised to keep writing to the point but then also told to ensure there is enough detail. Discerning the difference between being detailed and staying on point is something that comes with practice and being attuned to the finer details of disciplinary ways of knowing. Writing is learned (Emig 1977) and as McKellar (2000: 217) succinctly puts it: 'skills cannot be acquired in isolation from the body of knowledge to which they need to be applied'.

Writing skills therefore have a peculiar place in the academy. On the one hand, they are critical for writing effectively. On the other hand, they are *not enough* for writing effectively. As a result, the way that a series of writing skills contributes to writing effectively can be something that is overlooked. The problem this causes is that the reductive view of writing skills places some student writers in an awkward position. If a student arrives in Higher Education without fine-tuned writing skills, or in other words, the 'basics', then that particular student may be seen as somewhat lacking in their literacy abilities and subsequently seen as problematic, or even substandard, by the academy (Lea and Street 1998). We can see this in the development of university support structures. Whilst lending specialist support to students, they have tended to contribute to the negative connotations connected to students who needed help with their writing (Robotham 2008). Study skills services for writing are perceived at large as being at odds with what a student should be able to do (Baker 2011). Study skills services, as a result, infers a deficit in relation to the individual student seeking help from it. The negative connotation of skills alienates those seeking skills support, but also, cloaks the complexities of writing academically (Ferst 2000). With a deficit connected to the individual student, rather than the opaque nature of disciplinary and institutional conventions, writing struggles articulated as skills become a type of marginalisation within the academy (Lea and Street 1998; Wingate 2015).

2.2. 2 Refining Study Skills Provision

Challenging the deficit view of writing skills has proved difficult. The UK is sometimes seen as lagging behind the US in the way that student writing is supported (Wingate 2012). In the US, Rhetoric and composition approaches have been commonplace and a well-established

method to aid new student writers into the academy (Heyda 2006). The composition view of writing is informed by two substantial influences in developing student writing that has seen increasing sway in the UK sector (Lillis 2000). They are: writing across the curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WiD). The WAC perspective suggests that writing is part and parcel of learning, entailing that writing tasks, activities or events are best wrapped up in normal everyday learning and teaching provision (Russell 2000). The WAC approach aims to ease the deficit view of writing through the normalizing of accessing writing support. In short, WAC is seen as 'writing for learning' (Mcleod 2001). Writing in the Disciplines (WiD), on the other hand, can be seen as a subset of WAC and is based on the understanding that with each piece of writing, the writer 'writes the discipline' (Parker 2011: 6). To put it another way, the starting blocks from the WiD perspective is that writers increasingly become a *bona fide* writer within their particular discipline as they write (Monroe 2003). Thus, in short, WiD is seen as 'writing for communication' (Mcleod 2001). In summary, both WID and WAC perspectives seek for the integration of writing skills into the curriculum.

The UK context can be understood as having borrowed aspects from US thinking on the composition view of writing. However, the WiD perspective has also been difficult to develop in real tangible terms in the UK (Baratta 2012). Whereas composition modules in the US are generally the starting point for all students in the US, the UK has tended to rely on writing support services that exist alongside studies as an optional extra. The 'bolt-on' type of provision for student writing support has been outwardly criticized by learning development practitioners (Wingate 2006) for students having to seek out support rather than having support built-in and thus, normalized (Lea and Street 1998). Embedded writing

support strategies, on the other hand, are more likely to be viewed to work from the student point of view (Somerville and Crème 2005). Therefore bolstering study skills support, rather than questioning more deeply the ways in which the academy may appear alien to some students, has led to a lack of progress in the way student writing is supported and handled in the academy (Lea and Street 1998; Haggis and Pouget 2002). However, the arguments for 'doing away with study skills' (Wingate 2006) have not convinced many UK HEIs and if anything, centralized provision has expanded rather than ebbed away (*see* Whitchurch 2008).

Supporting writing in a way that is welcomed and accepted from the student point of view is challenging (Allen and Clarke 2007). There has been noted longstanding resistance from academic staff to give course content time away to skills-based learning (Biggs 1996). But the alternative found in study skills centres can be seen by students as both peripheral and inferior. Lecturers who mark student work are seen by students as the 'arbiters of the quality of assignments' (Leibowitz 2013: 36) and therefore perceived by students as having sole authority over whether writing is good or otherwise. Consultants, on the other hand, working in study skills roles, are more likely to be seen by students as the 'trained other' (Leibowitz 2013: 36). Study skills support therefore plays second fiddle to the advice and guidance that comes straight from the people involved in marking writing.

The case for students with English as another language (EAL) or (L2) is slightly different again. Students in most UK settings have access to specific provision that caters to the needs of students with EAL. Specialised services bring additional problems. For one, bespoke provision for certain students means that the student body is broken down into 'types' of

students (Orr and Blythman 2000). The sectioning off of student groups denotes who needs help and who is deemed as competent (Wingate 2015). However, it could also be argued that EAL students face challenges distinct from home students (Fenton-O'Creevy and van Mourik 2016), and therefore, some sort of tailored provision might be appropriate. Secondly, the tradition of specialized support for students with EAL for some represents an established and longstanding pedagogy that renders EAL provision as a discipline in and of itself (Wingate and Tribble 2012). Despite this, EAL provision is sometimes *still* seen as remedial and for students whose language is not quite up-to-scratch (Broekhoff 2014). EAL provision therefore, whilst specialist, established and even disciplinary, can also become perceived in deficit terms.

Attempts to combine essay support with course content through timetabled delivery for all students might be a way to overcome the hurdles created by the perceived divide between study skills support and course content (Durkin and Main 2002). However, approaches aimed to bridge study skills and mainstream teaching have received mixed success. Workshops provided to discrete cohorts and modules sometimes attracts patchy attendance and may appear 'remedial' to some students (Harrington *et al* 2006). When workshops are facilitated by full-time academic lecturers *of the discipline,* these types of negative perceptions tend to reduce *(*Harrington *et al* 2006*),* echoing how 'who' is a critical component in determining whether or not students perceive writing support as 'valid' (Leibowitz 2013).

The broader deployment of WAC within UK contexts has also been reported as problematic. Clughen and Hardy (2011) reported how their participatory activities underestimated

student willingness to participate. They suggested that students in a consumer-led Higher education system might be less convinced by student-led pedagogies and prefer lecturer-led teaching as more likely reflecting the value of tuition fees. Elsewhere, students working in writing groups reported that they disliked working in groups as a way to support the learning process and their writing development (Magogwe, Ramoraka and Mogana-Monyepi 2015). A disliking for group-based work seems to be the case more generally bar the occasional exception (See Johnson and Sambell 2000). More recently, Scotland (2016) conducted a study on assessed group work and collaborative writing within which students reported positively on the group work element including group-assessed work. Often, however, resistance appears to be encountered towards group work generally (Masika and Jones 2016) and with group assessment tasks specifically (Chipperfield 2013).

2.2.3 Learning and Teaching Discourses

So far, the writing environment, in terms of how writing is supported, has been discussed in relation to study skills provision. The literature suggests how study skills provision is often viewed as either remedial or peripheral and often convened in ways that place a deficit on the student (Wingate 2006; Lea and Street 1998). Existing research around why students may or may not take-up study skills support in the form of a discrete provision, points to a student desire to connect writing support to course content and discipline-specific staff. However, even integrated and embedded approaches that draw from the WAC and WiD disciplines are not without some student disgruntles. Peer work has been reported as a cheap version of academic-led support, and group work can be seen either as a risk due to other students compromising other people's efforts or as an unfair advantage to students

who might piggyback on others' success. But if study skills provision is riddled with issues that hamper success, then the alternative avenue for developing writing is through the more implicit route of learning and teaching discourses (Peters 2000), often, in relation to assessment and feedback.

2.2.4 Assessment and Feedback

Assessment has a 'double duty' (Boud 2000). It must, at once, measure learning and stimulate it. The widening of access to Higher Education in the UK some twenty years ago concentrated efforts on the needs of undergraduate student writers in relation to assessment tasks (English 2002; Lowy 2000; Mcmillan 2000). There has since been an explosion in the variation of summative assessment types (Gibbs 2006) which has become predominantly referred to in practice as 'diversity in assessment' (Stowell and Woolf 2004: 1). Assessment diversity tends to be rationalized in one of two ways. Firstly, diversifying assessment strategies means that, in the round, an array of assessment methods offers a range of ways for all students to demonstrate their abilities (Libman 2010; Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston and Rees 2012; Entwistle 2005). Secondly, assessment diversity exposes students, to their benefit, to the various genres associated with the discipline being studied (Eriksson and Carlsson 2013).

Disciplinary specific assessment practices reflect the relationship that is said to exist between assessment and pedagogic practices at the level of the discipline (Kreber 2009). Disciplinary differences can be found in different approaches to both student learning (Neumann 2001), and the assessment of student learning (Bearman *et al* 2017). For

example, Law students may need to become conversed in case studies and be able to generate arguments built upon past precedents. Students studying Chemistry are required to show competencies in laboratories that can be later captured within writing that reflects the specific and precise processes involved in scientific work. These types of connections between the needs of the discipline and the assessment of learning are understood as part of the broader field of 'assessment literacy' (Price *et al* 2012). The notion of 'assessment literacy' is concerned with both tutor and student understanding of assessment and assessing practices. However, 'assessment literacy' can also be extended to consider 'the influence of different disciplinary assessment patterns on student learning' (Jessop and Maleckar 2016: 698). One such application of 'assessment literacy' can be found in the 'epistemic match' (O'Siochru and Norton 2014) that exists between the student and their discipline. The 'epistemic match' denotes the extent to which a student's personal epistemological position concurs with that of the conventions of the discipline being studied. A *close* 'epistemic match' is a useful aid in the way a student might approach an assessment task (O'Siochru and Norton 2014). For instance, a student on a teacher training course may expect to think in terms of what is expected as best practice led by professional precepts compared to a student of Philosophy who might be encouraged to think more expansively and 'beyond the pale'. This type of variation, across the disciplines, therefore requires a type of buy-in from students. Students who place a value on the rationale behind an assessment task at an epistemological level are advantaged by having some understanding of where the assignment is coming from (O'Siochru 2018). To put it another way, doing well in writing, at the point of assessment, depends partly upon the extent to which a student feels allied to the discipline they study and the assessment approaches taken within it. For the purposes of illustration again, a student of Sociology may find

themselves better aligned to the assessment task of essay work if they are able to appreciate the murkier nature of dealing with theory. Likewise, a student of History may find that they are better placed to do well in writing if they see their role as someone who must become literate at using a range of secondary and sometimes sparse and unusual sources. Therefore, assessment is not without some very important disciplinary nuances that shape assessment practices both in terms of what is planned by academic staff members and by student responses to it.

However, understanding assessment as part of understanding the discipline speaks to but a small part of 'assessment literacy' (Price *et al* 2012). Variation and diverse practices within the disciplines also requires students to get to grips with more and more assessment types. This can be a process that is fraught and disliked by some students (Rai and Lillis 2013). Additionally, because students may have a propensity to see writing as a product rather than a process (Hartley and Knapper 1984), student preoccupation can become overly concerned with the value of the end-product. This makes it difficult for students to fully embrace the learning opportunities connected to the processes of writing (Cole 2012). Academic staff may also feel that there are too many barriers in the way of assessment innovation. For example, staff may harbor concerns over student unwillingness to engage in novel approaches (Norton, Norton and Shannon 2013), of which staff are likely to be held accountable for via student module evaluations (Carless 2009).

Alongside assessment is feedback. Similarly to assessment, feedback is often viewed as another important aid in the support and development of student writing (Ferst 2000). Feedback is articulated to students often as a set of typologies consisting of 'direct

criticism', 'praise', 'descriptive observations', 'rhetorical questions', 'regulatory instructions' and 'advisory suggestion' (Higgins, Hartley and Skelton 2000: 172). Through these ways of articulating feedback, students are encouraged to evolve their writing practices (Woodward-Kron 2004). Additionally, feedback can be deployed in more targeted ways and focus on a specific area of writing. For example, providing feedback predominantly on referencing and plagiarism (*see* Ireland and English 2011).

But feedback is not without its problems. Frequent concerns raised by academic staff are often about student preparedness to engage with the feedback they receive (Bloxham and Boyd 2007). Time and energies spent generating lengthy and detailed feedback is time-consuming, and often staff feel that student engagement with feedback may not be commensurate with the labour it entails (Dysthe 2011). There is also a potential 'gap' that sits between what markers say about student work, and what students might understand is being said about their work (Evans 2013; Price, Handley, Millar and O'Donovan 2010; Norton and Norton 2001). Providing feedback is not as simple as passing a message from one person to another (Higgins, Hartley and Skelton 2001) and is subject to misinterpretation between the person sending the message (i.e. the marker) and the person receiving it (i.e. the student) (*see* Duck and McMahan 2015). Subsequently, feedback is increasingly viewed as something that should be more dialogic (Ajjawi and Boud 2018). But to make dialogic feedback successful, students need to develop abilities in 'appreciating feedback; making judgements; managing affect; and taking action' (Carless and Boud 2018). Complicating this process is the way that students' own perceptions of their writing (involving structuring, addressing the question, evaluating with evidence and the like) may not tally with academic staff views when

reviewing the same work (Norton and Norton 2001). The feedback 'gap' is a particularly difficult one to close.

Other issues to do with feedback are more structural. The timing of feedback in particular is often viewed as problematic (Boud 2007; Hounsell 2007; Lou, Dedic & Rosenfield 2003; Grace & Gravestock 2009; Radloff & Harpe 2003). Feedback may be viewed as untimely when students receive feedback after they have moved onto to something else (Norton, Clifford, Hopkins, Toner and Norton 2002). In summary, while feedback can be seen as critical in aiding writing, executing it effectively is not always straightforward.

2.2.5 Assessment and the performative turn

Today's learning and teaching practices, in relation to both assessment and feedback, can be understood as part of a pedagogical push to make instruction and expectations for writing more transparent (Reece and Walker 2003). But setting out specific instructions for others to follow in order to meet expectations resembles, in some ways, what has been called 'performativity'. At this point it should be clarified that the use of performativity in relation to education is distinct from Butler's (2011) meaning who uses the term to describe gender theory. Lyotard's (1984) notion of performativity, instead, is applied to school contexts (*see* Ball 2003; Clapham 2015). Compulsory education settings and the work of teachers have frequently been recognized as part of a performative culture (Wilkins 2011). Performativity in this sense describes the ways in which schools are compelled to achieve certain metrics of performance that are subsequently reflected in performance indicators such as school league tables. Thus, schools can be understood as 'a colonized space with a

dominant performance agenda' (Dann 2015: 2) within which: 'assessment takes over and dominates the curriculum so that what is assessed is mainly what is learnt' (Dann 2015: 1).

This view of schools, as a place of performativity with a specific focus on assessment, is beginning to be applied to students and student work in Higher Education contexts (Torrance 2012; Raaper 2018, Macfarlane 2015). In so doing, specific recognition is applied to the ways in which assessment is becoming ever more restrictive. To this end, Raaper (2018) discusses the constraining nature of assessment specifications such as learning outcomes, assessment criteria as well as assessment briefings that steer writing in increasingly specific ways. Raaper's argument is that assessment articulations are becoming disciplining devices that provide standardized instruction in ways that produce standardized work. Subsequently, assessment practices in Higher Education are becoming ever more standardized and driven by criteria and outcomes (Torrance 2012).

The change in assessment practices towards standardized criteria brings with it a danger. In the efforts to make clear assessment expectations, there lies an increasing possibility of reducing essay work into something formulaic (McKenney 2018; Ttoouli and Ganobcsik-Williams 2017). In providing explicit instruction there is the potential for writing to become *overly guided* in such a way that encourages 'mechanistic' and thereby surface and overtly strategic approaches to writing (Norton 2004: 689). The deployment of assessment approaches in Higher Education is paradoxical in a system that promotes criticality and independent learning on one hand, 'while in practice highly conformative assessment procedures are being designed and developed' (Torrance 2012: 324), on the other.

One tangible example of 'conformative assessment procedures' (Torrance 2012: 324) can be seen in the use of writing frames (Fulford 2009). Whilst an established writing aid in primary and secondary education (*see* Lewis and Wray 1995), writing frames are increasingly being used in the Higher Education sector with undergraduate students. A pedagogic device normally applied in compulsory education contexts seems at odds with the more complex needs of the Higher Education sector. That aside, the problem of using writing frames with students in Higher Education is in the propensity for such devices to coercively restrict how an essay, in its writing *and thought*, might be handled (Fulford 2009).

Assessment practices that provide ever more explicit instruction is a difficult tide to resist. Student satisfaction is all-important and providing assurances to students that they will do well in assignments helps these types of metrics from dipping. Moreover, schools may have unwittingly contributed to a culture that has normalized an overt focus on assessment creating a type of 'league table generation' of students (Itua, Coffey, Merryweather, Norton and Foxcroft 2014: 307). Therefore, when students enter university, they may well expect, (and not just appreciate), explicit and targeted assessment help.

2.2.6 Summary

Understanding the writing environment helps to capture the ways in which writing is perceived, how problems relating to writing are understood and what sort of treatments are being devised to help 'fix' writing (Barton 1994). UK study skills provision in HEIs continues to be bolt-on. Attempts to incorporate writing sessions into mainstream teaching, and to move beyond a deficit view, presents numerous difficulties. Assessment and feedback

strategies provide an alternative way to support student development of writing. From the student point view, support for writing that is explicitly linked to assessment is now frequently expected (Blair 2017). From the academy perspective, low satisfaction scores in National Student Surveys heighten the urgency of getting assessment and feedback right. Moreover, resistance from academic staff to give delivery time away to study skills content can be solved through learning and teaching discourses that make writing their business. To this end, assessment and feedback practices tend to be used as a way to overcome the writing struggles of 'not knowing what is needed' and of 'making the implicit explicit'. However, there are emerging concerns that within efforts to make writing expectations crystal clear, there is a slide into telling student writers what to write (Fulford 2009; Street, Lea and Lillis 2015). In other words, when writing is supported in terms of the assessment at hand, although likely to be welcomed by students, these practices might restrict the way students come to think and write. These concerns are starting to be recognized through the notion of performativity (Raaper 2018; Torrance 2012) and how, performative cultures from compulsory education settings may be creeping into Higher Education assessment practices.

2.3 How do student writers tend to approach writing?

2.3.1 Introduction

The approaches and strategies that students adopt in writing involve cognitive processes such as individual intentions and motivations. Study skills support may promote particular approaches to writing (Donnelly 2014), but the extent to which students follow such guidance is another set of considerations for those involved in supporting student writing

(Durst and Newell 1989). As discussed so far, learning and teaching discourses might inadvertently locate writing as a pursuit that is primarily assessment-related as opposed to being intricately learning-related. However, the influence of learning and teaching discourses over how writing support is convened in pedagogic practice raises questions around how students might interpret and react to these sorts of messages. The next section explores the ways students respond towards the UK HE writing environment, with respect to their possible approaches, motivations and intentions.

2.3.2 Writing intentions

The differences between deep and surface learning (see Marton and Saljo 1976) seems to be a good place to start when it comes to writing intentions. Deep and surface learning are frequently used as a shorthand way to capture some of Marton and Saljo's (1976) seminal thinking on the way motivation and intentions shape learning. Surface-level processing suggests 'a 'reproductive' conception of learning' with student orientation towards 'the sign' – or what was said (Marton and Saljo 1976: 7). For example, to glean the bare minimum to get by (i.e. pass an exam) is often viewed as typical of a 'surface' approach to learning. Deep-level processing, by contrast, refers to 'comprehending what the author wants to say' with student orientation towards 'the signified' – or what was implied (Marton and Saljo 1976: 7-8). Approaching learning in ways that aim to develop profound and sustaining comprehension of a specific discipline may be viewed as typical of 'deep' learning. In 1997 (and updated in 2013), a 'strategic' approach was added as part of a study skills inventory devised to help students identify their own approaches to study (*see* Entwistle, McCune and Tait 1997). As well as 'deep' and 'surface' approaches, a third

approach indicated a middle ground between 'deep' and 'surface' that was broadly seen as 'achievement-orientated'. Since Entwistle's 1997 version, there have been other attempts to chisel further granularity into similar inventories (*see* Asikainen, Parpala, Virtanen and Lindblom-Ylanne 2013). Increasingly, study approaches are reported as a mix of deep, surface and strategic strategies that foreground different approaches at different times (Gijbels and Dochy 2006).

Applied to the case of student writing, Norton, Tilley, Newstead and Franklyn-Stokes (2001), in their survey of student essay-writing tactics considered the potential use of strategic or achievement-orientated learning. They suggested two main domains underpinning learning as either a 'meaning orientation' denoting deep learning, or a 'reproducing orientation' denoting surface learning. The tactics, employed by student writers, were referred to in the research as the 'rules of the game'. Such 'rules' were student interpretations of what tactics would get 'good' grades and led students to operate in 'syllabus-bound' (2001: 269) ways. The tactics students deployed were self-generated and not based on instructions provided to them by academic staff. Student use of tactics increased as students progressed from one year to the next and included approaches such as choosing an easy title, going beyond the reading list, making work distinctive and using 'big' words. Less frequently found were essay tactics such as handing work in early to give a good impression and avoiding controversial topics. Some tactics even strayed into cheating, such as, inventing research and changing dates on research used.

Yielding similar concerns about the tactics some student writers adopt, there exists reported cases of L2 students engaging in 'dumping' (adding in references out of context or

without full integration into the essay) and 'patchwriting' (copying text and gradually changing the words so they are no longer verbatim) (Stockall and Cole 2016). It is not unreasonable, but perhaps would be rather bigoted, to suggest that such practices are exclusive to L2 students. And it would be easy to discount such practices as students being lazy writers. Instead, it is worthwhile to consider why such a set of approaches might develop and at times become prevalent amongst student writers in the first place. One glaring starting point would be with the distorting impact that assessment can have upon learning (Batten, Jessop and Birch 2019). The primacy of assessment can dissuade students from 'deep learning'. Students (and not just staff) may recognize this and start to see assessment as inauthentic and unrelated to real learning (Norton *et al* 2001) – particularly so when approaches are undertaken 'in response to the teacher-imposed demands' (Scott 2005: 299). Therefore, the use of tactics can be understood as born out of conflict rather than out of choice (Batten, Jessop and Birch 2019).

2.3.3 Student writing and the notion of 'risk'

The tension between learning and assessment has been articulated as 'a conflict between the requirements of grade-getting and students' desires to learn in a personally satisfying way' (Hounsell 1997: 107). The decision to put the need for personal satisfaction aside for the sake of 'grade-gain' can be thought of in terms of risk. Thesen and Cooper (2014) apply the notion of risk to think about the conflicts present within writing at academic and postgraduate student levels. They propose that when researchers write for external audiences, either to secure publication or to secure bids and grant monies, writing involves the active curtailing of content and ideas. The gaze of the external audience, with its power

to decide what writing is rewarded (in terms of publication or grant awards), sculpts writing through an academic writer's deliberate decision-making over what to write and what not to write. Thus, Thesen and Cooper (2014) point out that writing can be thought about as being shaped by what is *not* written – the ideas, the possibilities, the insights – that didn't make the final cut.

The connection between what is written and what is silenced in the context of risk can be likened to undergraduate student writing. Student writers have been known to err on the side of caution by preferring to 'play safe' in their writing (Read, Francis and Robson 2001) and can become overly driven by 'knowing what was wanted' by staff marking their work (Hartley and Chesworth 2000: 21). But what if teacher-pleasing strategies were born out of something more affective than grade-gain? Risk, in relation to writing, may help to see how writing strategically and tactically *to the nth degree*, might be something that is convened out of worry rather than out of ambition. Education is a critical time for most. Key qualifications represent life-changing moments for many young people (Batten, Jessop and Birch 2019; Denscombe 2000). Educational experiences in general exert an importance on academic ability in ways that impact on self-worth (Reay 2006; Covington 1992; Covington and Beery 1976). These types of pressures prompt a desire to protect one's self-worth (Cantor and Norem 1989; Martin, Marsh and Debus 2003; Jackson 2002). The desire to avoid risk is therefore something that can be viewed as defensive rather than consumptive amid a world that threatens rather than entitles. Risk has a place in understanding student writing.

2.3.4 Student writing, feel-good factors and personal satisfaction

The notion of risk may prompt students to believe it is prudent to write in certain grade-gain ways. Therefore, intrinsic motivation to develop knowledge and engage in deep learning may get overruled by competing external factors. Indeed, students are not ubiquitously assessment-driven in ways that promote the more superficial approaches to learning. For example, Higgins, Hartley and Skelton (2002) reported how students are 'conscientious' and seek feedback in ways that help them to develop 'deep' knowledge. More recently, research has reported on student enthusiasm for disciplinary knowledge and a genuine attachment to the discipline (Naude, Nel, van der Watt and Tadi 2016). Therefore, the picture is not entirely negative.

The rewards of writing for undergraduate students have not been reported on so commonly in relation to undergraduate students. For professional and academic writers, however, there are more insights into why writing also contains some feel-good factors (Cain and Pople 2011). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) used the notion of 'flow' to help capture the ways writing felt good once writers had established a 'stride'. The idea of 'flow' suggests that when writing comes it can be a rewarding rather than a daunting experience and can be an encounter that denotes Fromm's mode of 'being'. Furthermore, academics can find writing enjoyable due to the iterative and contributory nature of writing for the field (Murray and Moore 2006). Whilst recognizing the many difficulties with writing, Murray and Moore (2006) highlight how writing brings about a sense of achievement and feelings of pride. Elsewhere, Elbow (2000) talked about the 'heightened intensity' that comes about during writing *for any writer* and how this is a moment in which writing simply feels good. Elbow refers to the instances of 'increased

intensity or arousal or excitement' that tends to occur when 'it feels as though more things come to mind, bubble up, and that somehow they fall more directly into language' (Elbow 2000: 127). Therefore, there is recognition of the more positive aspects of writing that may shape the way writing is viewed and experienced by writers, including, *potentially*, student writers.

To this end, Thesen (2013) talks about edge pedagogy for writers. The notion of 'edgework' is normally used as a criminological and sociological lens to explain why some people take voluntary risks (Lyng 2008). Within the 'edgework' model, taking risks is seen as an expression of resistance that provides a sense of freedom and agency in an otherwise restrictive world. Thus, the use of risk in 'edgework' sits in contrast to the typically negative view of risk imposed by Beck (Mythen 2004). The edgework perspective draws attention to the ways that people specifically seek out risk through high-risk leisure pursuits (such as bungee jumping or base jumping), dangerous occupations (firefighting, police work) or participating in some criminal activities as part of thrill-seeking (O'Malley 2010). Autonomy and autonomous action in an entrepreneurial sense is a further example of how risk can be experienced and thought of in positive terms (Kemshall 2006). For Higher Education researchers, taking risks may be a productive way of unveiling new ways of thinking about the world (Canagarajah and Lee 2014).

But for writing in the world of Higher Education specifically, Thesen and Cooper (2013) discuss how postgraduate and research writers can adopt the edgework model as a type of 'edgework pedagogy' (Hunma and Sibomana 2013: 116). They suggest how initiatives such as peer and group writing allow space for 'spontaneity, flow and play' (*ibid* 2013: 116) in

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ways that generate 'a more assertive, agency-focused approach' (Thesen 2014: 14) to writing. Parallels can be drawn from edgework pedagogy to the earlier works of Britton *et al* (1975) who believed that expressive writing, understood as 'personal and intimate uses of written language' (Durst 2015: 390), provides the springboard for the more transactional types of writing such as academic forms. WAC also shares a similar position in the way that *play* in writing is understood as critical in *aiding* writing (Mcleod 2001). Therefore, there are several schools of thought that suggest there is argument to encourage risk and play in writing and would advocate ways to help writing become less subject to practices that tend to restrict and curtail it (*see also* Badenhorst, Moloney, Dyer, Rosales and Murray 2015).

2.3.5 Summary

This section has discussed how student intentions help shape the way that writing is approached. As seen, in an assessment-driven Higher Education culture underpinned by a consumer-led system, students may pick up on cues to write tactically. In some ways, tactical approaches may be prudent. However, wholesale moves to write what is wanted may be taking things too far. At the expense of 'grade gain' are the potential casualties of personal satisfaction, personal and academic growth and the simple enjoyment of writing. One might be tempted to take a cynical view over the students who appear to adopt grade gain approaches to writing. However, we have also seen how postgraduate and research writing is ushered in certain ways by steers such as access to grant monies and working towards getting published. Such a view involves the notion of risk and has the potential to raise questions around the difficult positions student writers might find themselves in. Writing for grade-gain is not necessarily an out-and-out choice, and involves compromises to write in

what feels like less authentic and less personally satisfying ways. Student writers are stuck between a rock and a hard place.

2.4 Further challenges and risks associated with writing for undergraduate student writers

2.4.1 Introduction

So far, the intentions, motivations and tactics of student writers have pivoted on 'the individual act of putting words on paper' (Thesen 2014: 5). But another aspect of risk in writing can be found in the 'the experiential' of what is experienced, felt and perceived more widely by writers. In the next section, some of the challenges and risks relating to writing are explored more broadly to shed light on 'the range of emotions of lived academia' (Lillis 2014: 240) from the undergraduate point of view. These challenges and risks are eclectic and start with fears, worries and self-doubt about writing. The discussion evolves to consider risks associated with fairness, marking and marking processes for student writers. Thirdly, the challenges of reflective writing, that imposes a particular demand on writers to 'open up' personally and emotionally in writing, are considered as a writing risk. Finally, I refer to transition and threshold studies to consider the temporal challenges of writing. I explore when writing is troublesome and strained, including ways connected to writer identity. As such, the discussion will explore key 'risky' transitions such as the move into University, the move from one year to the next, and shifts involved in writing from genre to genre.

2.4.2 Writing in the affective domain

The emotions that student writers experience locate writing within the affective domain (Humphrey and Simpson 2012; Murray 2000). These emotional aspects of writing, or the 'psycho-social processes' of writing (Murray 2000: 261), can provoke feelings of self-doubt, and anxiety (Hale and Harding 2000; Fernsten and Reda 2011) and a fear of failing overall (Chipperfield 2013). But worrying about writing can lead to a lack of confidence when confidence itself can be a psychological aid in writing endeavours (Pajeres, Hartley and Valiante 2001). A sense of self-assurance built from personal experience of success helps to create a positive mood that can be converted into motivation (Bandura 1997). Students, if they have experience of some sort of academic success, are often viewed as less likely to be 'fragile' and vulnerable to self-doubt (Mann 2000) and less daunted by academic requirements and workloads (Smith and Deane 2014).

One way to think about self-doubt and worry in relation to writing is how it 'involves putting learning on display' (Hounsell 1997: 106) and is a type of 'representation of self' (Hyland 2002: 1091). You are finding out if your own writing is 'adequate' (Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw 2000: 61) and whether, therefore, you really 'belong' (Shields 2015: 614) in the academy. Assessments and assessing turns the usually private pursuit of writing into a type of public property that opens student writers up to the judgement of the expert other (Hounsell 1997; Mann 2000). The process of assessing highlights the 'subject-positioning' (Ivanic 1998: 98) of both writers and readers and brings into focus 'how relatively powerless

writers are positioned by readers who are their assessors' (Ivanic 1998: 98). The power

imbalance in writing means that communicating feedback can be a fraught process making

it difficult for some students to be able to respond in 'feedback literate' ways (Pitt and

Norton 2017: 513). Judgments made about writing, however helpfully intended, can be

experienced by students as marginalizing and rouse feelings of self-doubt (Pitt and Norton

2017; Lillis 2000).

The differing levels of power subsumed in student writing stimulating self-doubt and anxiety

amongst student writers is articulated within Lea and Street's (1998) Academic Literacies

framework. They present three models: a skills model, a socialisation model and an

Academic Literacies model. Whereas the skills and socialisation models refer to,

respectively, the technical aspects of writing and acculturation into academic writing,

Academic Literacies locates student writing as a social practice. Critical to their Academic

Literacies viewpoint is that power is at the heart of how students experience getting to grips

with writing in the academy. 'Essayist literacy practices' (Lillis 2001: 39) is understood as

regulating student writing through the established conventions in Higher Education,

disciplinary differences and individual preferences of academic staff (Lillis 2001). Lillis (2001)

contends that, as a result, Higher Education has a history of denying alternative ways of

expressing ideas, even during the times when academia has opened up to a more diverse

range of students. Writing therefore requires some students to *lose* their 'voice' (Cooper

2014; McMillan 2000) and to take on another more befitting 'voice' in order to 'fit in' (Ivanic

1998), or to achieve higher grades (Francis, Robson & Read 2001). As a result, students may

'find their own experiences to be devalued and their literacy practices to be marginalized'

(Hyland 2002: 1094).

On the other side of the coin, self-doubt and anxiety in relation to writing is not necessarily specific to student writers nor an unusual way of experiencing the writing process (French 2018). And while criticism has been levied at the academy for its adherence to conventions, it is untenable to suggest that a 'free-for-all' approach in which writing rules are disregarded would be beneficial for student writers (Clughen and Connell 2015: 49). Rather, there is balance to be struck in terms of recognising the alienating nature of Higher Education for new student writers and articulating the challenges, struggles and risks that are often part and parcel of writing in Higher Education (French 2018). To put it another way, challenging *access to education* should not be conflated with doing away with challenges within education: 'if we take the risk out of education, there is a real chance that we take out education altogether' (Biesta 2013: 1).

2.4.3 Fairness, marking and marking processes

As so far mentioned, concerns around marking and marking practices are aspects of writing that magnify particularly the power differentials between staff and students. For example, as part of the Academic Literacies framework, feedback practices were discussed as conveying messages of staff ways being 'right' and student ways being 'wrong' (Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw 2000). But fast-forward to the high-fee and consumer compliance era of Higher Education, and the matter of marking and marking practices entails a very specific set of debates to do with issues of parity, fairness, reliability and transparency (Handley and Read 2017). These discussions often revolve around marking criteria to help explain to students how marking gets done, to aid marking reliability, and to encourage markers to use

'the full range of marks' (Handley and Read 2017: 135). But the extent of success in achieving reliable marking via rubrics and criterion documents remains uncertain (O'Hagan and Wigglesworth 2015), even when complemented by moderation meetings and standardization activities (Baird, Greatorex and Bell 2004; Ecclestone 2001). Marking therefore represents further power differentials and have become a particularly thorny issue in writing, involving tricky power dynamics that has, rather surprisingly, attracted less attention in relation to student writing research.

Debates around marking are more usually found within learning and teaching research concerned with assessment. Both examinations and essay-writing assessment tasks have been heralded as established, reliable and practical ways of measuring knowledge and ability (Heywood 2000; Brown, Bull & Pendlebury 1997). Student writing, additionally, has long been seen as a critical component within assessment and assessing strategies (Cox & Ingleby 1997). However, although assessment may be viewed by staff as an indicator of quality, students do not necessarily share such views (Fletcher, Meyer, Anderson, Johnston and Rees 2012) and are more likely to: 'harbour concerns about assessment, fairness, accuracy, and consistency' (Fletcher *et al* 2012: 129).

An example of student cynicism about assessment practices can be found in the work of Chipperfield (2013). Students held concerns about the potential of moving goalposts believing that rules were subject to change. There were also worries in relation to collaborative-based assessments in which students saw their own work as being potentially compromised by other students. Elsewhere, students reported feeling that examinations were particularly unfair - resting on one day which implied a sense of 'luck' for those who

did well but did not necessarily study consistently through the module (Stryven, Docy and Janssens 2005).

The notion of 'luck' in assessments evokes a sense of risk and does not sit comfortably within a consumer-bound Higher Education system in which parity and assurances are king. Risks that are dependent upon 'the luck of the draw', and the varying ways in which students might perceive it, can be understood via the element of 'controllability' within Weiner's (1986) attribution theory. In a nutshell, Weiner (1992) suggests that students attribute their own ideas around what does and does not contribute to levels of perceived success. Controllability is one such attribute and sits on a continuum. One end of the spectrum is what is within a person's control (i.e. in writing this could mean time spent researching, the selection and range of source types, attention to detail). On the other end of the spectrum is what is outside of a person's control (i.e. in writing this could be a harsh marker, an unexpected exam question). Consequently, writing and the way it is graded may be viewed in terms of a spectrum that includes factors both within and outside of individual student control. Writing and grading can become conceived, partly at least, as contingent upon fortune and misfortune and as such, constituting certain writing risks.

On this vein, Read, Francis and Robson (2005) discuss how fortune and misfortune plays out in the marking of essay work. They suggest that marking *is* a subjective task and therefore, there are inevitable uncertainties about the reliability of essay writing. They state: 'the 'quality' of a piece of writing to be assessed is ultimately constructed by the reader of the essay and cannot be objectively ascertained' (Read, Francis and Robson 2005: 258). Indeed, there are differences in the way academic staff derive their views on what makes good

writing (Fleming, Durkin and Main 2000) and so student observations about the differences across the way lecturers mark work are rightfully recognized by students as inconsistent (O'Hagan and Wigglesworth 2015; Norton 2009; Baird, Greatorex and Bell 2004). In reality, staff often mark using 'hunches' (Bloxham, Boyd and Orr 2011), intuition and experience (Yorke, Bridges and Woolf 2000) and, critically, judgement (Brooks 2012). However, marking processes tend to be articulated to students as an objective system that is criteria-led and ratified by lecturers, and not lecturer-led based on judgement and expertise that is ratified by assessment criteria (Bloxham, Boyd and Orr 2011).

The inexact science of marking student writing is perhaps a conversation that academics need to have with their students (Bloxham, den-Outer, Hudson and Price 2016). However, this sort of dialogue is unlikely within the consumer-bound nature of Higher Education within which there is a need to control risk (McWilliams 2009). But doing away with risk (in this instance referring to the eroding of subjectivity in marking) is both unrealistic and sits counter to what actually happens (*see* Baume, Yorke and Coffey 2010; Brooks 2012; Bloxham, den-Outer, Hudson and Price 2016). Education depends upon 'an encounter between human beings' (Biesta 2013: 1) and involves 'subjects of action and responsibility' (Biesta 2013: 1). The seamlessly objective approach in marking practice is even more unrealistic for many of the subjects within Higher Education in which debate and discussion are its lynchpins (Ylonen, Gillespie and Green 2018). The drive to do away with *all* subjectivity is therefore an under-appreciation of the humanness of education, of marking and of the place of debate within Higher Education. It may also waste time and resources in the name of its pursuit (Bloxham 2009) and promote unrealistic expectations to students in

a consumer-based Higher Education system (Bloxham, Boyd and Orr 2011). Marking, therefore, remains a key challenge and remains part of an ongoing and challenging debate.

2.4.4 Reflective writing

If disciplines built on debate represent one cloudy area for objective marking, then reflective writing provides a further example when subjectivity is even more difficult to escape. Reflective writing is, by definition, personal and by extension, potentially sensitive. It can be understood as a sub-genre of academic writing that invites students to meta-cognitively appreciate their own development (Ryan 2011). The prevalence of reflective writing in summative assessment tasks appears to come hand-in-hand with the increase of professional degree courses (Hoadley-Maidment 2000). As a result, more and more students are required to engage in reflective writing as part of their degree studies. Within reflective writing, students are encouraged to 'open up' and therefore, reflective assessment tasks tend to invite students to be personal (Tarrant 2013). For some, reflective writing might be experienced as a 'liberating opportunity' (Crème 2000: 110). For others, reflective writing may generate: 'discomforts of this self-exposure' (Tomkins and Nicholds 2017: 255). Either way, reflective writing requires an emotional reaction – particularly if to be successful in it (Bleakley 2000).

The personal nature of reflective writing raises some questions and not least the ethical challenges inherent in encouraging students to search their feelings as a way to anchor practice-based learning (Marsh 2014). For some students, this type of expected soul-searching may prompt the reliving of something traumatic (Marsh 2014). Therefore,

arguments that propose reflective writing as empowering (*see* Moon 2006 on the transformative properties of reflection) may be overlooking instances where that might not be the case (Marsh 2014; Rai 2011). Additionally, reflective writing requests the writer to become an object of study. But galvanizing information from a person is normally subject to ethical scrutiny, and subject to increasing amounts of quality controls (McWilliam 2009; Haggerty 2004). However, reflection is not treated in the same way, and yet there is no choice, or opportunity to agree to 'informed consent' bar opting out of the course that requires reflective writing in the first place. The potential issues relating to reflective writing implicate this writing genre as a potential challenge with some risks for some student writers.

2.4.5 Transition Studies and Boundary Work

While a few student writers might find reflective writing personally problematic, many more may find that the transition to writing within a new sector, style, genre or level, a tricky time in their writing endeavours (Baynham 2000). Transition and liminality studies pay particular attention to specific 'thresholds' associated with Higher Education study. For example, from school or college into University, from the first year to the final year in undergraduate study, and the leap from undergraduate to postgraduate study (Scott 2011). Transition studies also include international student groups taking up their studies in UK settings (see Leedham 2014; Fenton-O'Creevy and van Mourik 2016). Many of these studies are derived theoretically from the work of anthropologist Victor Turner (1967) who used the concepts of liminality and threshold to articulate the experience of transition. Following research related to widening participation and non-traditional student groups, further research has

been carried out to explore key transition points within and onto Higher Education (Elander, Norton, McDonough and Foxcroft 2009; Haggis and Pouget 2002).

The initial focus in transition studies were to do with the first essay submissions by students new to Higher Education (McCune 2004); and indeed, this can be a critical first step in the integration into the academy (Krause 2002). However, transition is an ongoing phenomena (Macmillan and Mclean 2005) and education journeys include the move from school to college, from college to university, and from undergraduate to Master's. (Delcambre and Donahue 2011). Each step-change involves various liminal junctions in which many students find themselves 'thrown back into newness' (Delcambre and Donahue 2011: 19). As such, transition is usually understood as referring to multiple transitions over time. Initiatives such as 'writing transfer', have been developed in some places to help students hang on to what has worked whilst also evolving writing practices (Farrell and Tighe-Mooney 2015). Thus, moving from context to context is often a critical time for student writers, and suggests that learning to write is ongoing and troublesome, and not progressive and certain.

The transitional nature of writing can also be thought of as 'boundary work' (Ivanic 1998: 14). Writing in the academy that requires new approaches to writing and critically, changing one's way of writing, may feel like a type of 'identity crisis' and perceived as something that feels 'pretentious' and 'false' (Ivanic 1998: 81). The troublesome nature of identity work (Ball, Maguire & Macrae 2000: 40) when viewed as part of writing endeavours, brings the matter of student writing (and transition and threshold studies) to the field of identity and writing (Gee 1990).

For postgraduate writers within academia, issues of identity involves the process of *establishing* a voice through writing (Kamler and Thomson 2014). Text work is identity work when writers specifically carve out scholarly identities during writing in order to position themselves both theoretically and as 'experts in the field' (Kamler and Thomson 2014). One related difficulty for postgraduate writers may be in the grapple over the extent to which they can claim authority (Hunma and Sibomana 2014). At undergraduate level, if asked to write at once as the scholar and the professional, some students studying vocational degrees may struggle in reconciling competing professional and academic identities (Soloman 2005).

These types of examples taken from both postgraduate (Kamler and Thomson 2014) and undergraduate levels (Soloman 2005) reveal how the debate surrounding transition and writer identity revolves around the extent to which writers are at liberty to use agency when they write. Put together with other research that centres on self-doubt, losing voice, and feeling marginalized by the academy, student writing research can be seen as often focused on the ways student writers succumb to change and the adaptations they have to make in their writing and writer identities.

However, the notion of identity has also been used by some scholars to highlight the way writing *does* contain aspects of the self (Rowsell and Pahl 2007; Ivanic 1998). The writing of school-aged children, for example, contains traces of the self, or 'sedimented identities' that suggest an inevitability in the way writing offers agency (Rowsell and Pahl 2007). The theoretical contribution of structuration (Giddens 1991) has also been appropriated to help describe writing as a mode of 'authoring' (Holland *et al* 1998). Writing is seen as enabling

agency but all the while necessarily constrained by existing rules, norms and expectations bound to literacy practices (Holland *et al* 1998). Therefore, while there is much focus on how students must fit the mold of academia, there is also literature that points to the ways in which writers inevitably impart aspects of themselves into their writing.

2.4.6 Summary

Writing risks and challenges can be thought of as connected to the more affective aspects of writing. Collectively, these types of writing struggles reveal additional ways in which students might come to view and think about writing as an endeavor connected to some types of risk. For example, some writing risks might be around putting writing on display and dealing with anxieties over failing. Another set of writing risks might relate to marking and assessment practices. Reflective writing has also been discussed as constituting some risks for some students on some types of courses. And finally, the challenges in relation to liminality and newness conjures up other risks around keeping pace, dealing with 'boundary work' (Ivanic 1998) and 'identity work' (Kamler and Thomson 2014) in ways connected to the evolving identities of student writers.

2.5 Summary of Chapter

Literature has been reviewed in order to help understand more clearly the writing environment for today's UK undergraduate students. The writing environment was firstly considered in terms of how writing is supported via study skills provisioning and through learning and teaching discourses, particularly, within assessment and feedback practices.

Study skills may have limited reach in contrast to learning and teaching discourses that appear to attract student attention when overtly linked to an assessment. However, too much focus on assessment can overshadow wider learning and the more transformative potential of Higher Education.

Secondly, the writing environment was explored by considering the ways in which students approach writing. Student responses to an assessment-driven culture within Higher Education were thought about in terms of intentions, drawing from deep, strategic and surface-level strategies. Some writing strategies can be seen as a response to a consumer-led system. But risk can also be considered as a stimulant in the way students approach writing – particularly in the context of a system that promotes the importance of high attainment. Finally, attention was paid to the ways in which student writers might resist strategic learning by exploring writing as rewarding, personally satisfying and providing scope to think through ideas and debates.

The final section of the literature review was devoted to the further challenges and risks that students might encounter in today's HE writing environment. Writing was thought about as affective, as uncontrollable, as personal and as liminal. In this section, writing was considered in various ways to explicate other hidden risks and struggles within the writing environment from an undergraduate point of view.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The complexities of writing have been explored in the literature review and in doing so revealed how an understanding of writing as a skill deals with but a small component part of writing (Pahl and Rowsell 2005). A more complete view is generally understood as enveloping theoretically the social practices that exist around writing (Street 1984; Czerniewska 1992). To understand more the social view of writing, I turn to theoretical works located within the wing of New Literacy Studies. I draw from the Academic Literacies models of writing to firstly explore how student writing in Higher Education can be conceived of (Lea and Street 1998). I consider how the agency afforded to student writers may be an understated aspect of Academic Literacies thinking (Tyldesley 2013). Plugging this apparent gap, I discuss how Thesen and Cooper's (2014) notions of 'voice' and the 'tilting point' that occur on the cusp 'between production and reception' (Thesen 2014: 15) might offer useful additionality in the articulation of the struggle between structure and agency in writing in ways that are useful for this thesis.

3.2 Writing as a social practice

Writing understood as a social practice can be traced back to works from critical linguists such as Fairclough (1989) and Halliday (1989; 2007), and the New Literacy movement in the 1980s and 1990s (Street 1984; Gee 1996; Barton and Hamilton 1998). Street (1984) began

to see writing as distinct from developing a universal set of skills. Writing, he argued, involved situated practices shaped by those in positions of power and therefore was ideological rather than autonomous. Gee (1990: 3) began to stress the 'local' aspects of writing in ways that started to ally with research into student writing from sociological perspectives (Hounsell 1997; Lillis 1997). But it is within the works of Lea and Street (1998), strongly influenced by New Literacy Studies, who enveloped student writing into a discrete theoretical framework to articulate the social practices of student academic writing within Higher Education.

Via their Academic Literacies model, Lea and Street (1998) provide a base for understanding writing in Higher Education contexts as a social practice. Their aim is to 'throw light on failure or non-completion, as well as success and progression' (Lea and Street 1998: 158). The articulation that Lea and Street provide is a deliberate move away from a technical view of writing that many, they argue, hold as a commonsense view for understanding writing. Thus, Lea and Street (1998) see writing as a more complex phenomenon and develop their position drawing from the New Literacy movement that locates writing, not insulated from, but molded out of socio-cultural influences (Street 1984; Gee 1996; Barton and Hamilton 1998). To this end, writing is seen to reflect power relations inherent in the disciplinary-specific epistemological beliefs around what can be viewed as knowledge and how knowledge claims can be made.

The social practices perspective of writing can also be seen as a central component of Ivanic's (2004) 'discourses of writing'. Ivanic's work, developed throughout the 1990s can be seen also as part of the New Literacy movement with emphasis placed on social processes

and matters of identity. She describes how her view of 'discourses of writing' refers to 'constellations of beliefs about writing, beliefs about learning to write, ways of talking about writing, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment which are likely to be associated with these beliefs' (Ivanic 2004: 224). Such constellations are an attempt to capture writing at all levels of education as opposed to the Academic Literacies framework that deals solely with writing in higher education contexts. However, both Lea and Street's (1998) Academic Literacies 'critical frame' (Street 2009: 4) and Ivanic's (2004) 'discourses of writing' attempt to provide a way of thinking about writing that problematizes the view that writing is 'autonomous' (Street 1984).

In total, Lea and Street (1998) outline three models to represent the three ways in which the phenomenon of student academic writing tends to be perceived from within the academy. Ivanic (2004) offers further granularity via six discourses of writing that are to be viewed as potentially, although not necessarily, overlapping. The discourses that Ivanic outlines include a skills discourse, a creativity discourse, a process discourse, a genre discourse, a social practices discourse and a sociopolitical discourse. I will present the thinking behind both the Academic Literacies framework and the Discourses of Writing in tandem, to lay out a clear view of the complex ways in which writing can be seen as a product of the social world from these two works.

The first model Lea and Street (1998) present is the skills model. The skills model views writing as solely skills-based. It is a focus on the technical and grammatical issues relating to writing. In short, it is a reductive model and assumes that writing is a surface level skill that can be artificially broken down into: 'a set of atomized skills that students have to learn.'

(Lea & Street 1998: 158). It is problematical further because it is a deficit model that locates the problem with the student (Gamache 2002), corroborating with ways in which students can themselves feel personally responsible for their inability to not meet academy standards and expectations (Catt and Gregory 2006). Overall, it is ill-equipped to deal with the affective nature of writing.

The skills discourse that Ivanic describes shares similarities with Lea and Street's Skills Model. The skills discourse similarly refers to the ways in which writing is understood as something that belongs to a set of technical and grammatical skills that should be learnt and taught. Earlier literature can sometimes be found to reflect the significance that was once attached to the technical aspects of writing in student work (*see* Bourke and Holbrook 1992). However, increasingly, the skills based foci has attracted criticism for its tendency to bring into view student error rather than student achievement (Curry 2006), thus becoming a deficit view of writing. Nevertheless, much of the literacy learning in the new primary curriculum reflects this particular skills-based view of writing (Watson 2015) with a strong emphasis attached to the belief that children need to know the grammatical nature of language such as: what a conjugated verb is, what a preposition is and so on (*see* Safford 2016).

Secondly, Lea and Street (1998) propose an Academic Socialisation model. This subsumes the skills model but in addition, sees academic writing as a style that students need to be exposed to and become familiar with in order to learn good academic writing. In their words, 'the task of the tutor/advisor is to induct students into a new 'culture'' (1998: 158). It

takes a more complex view of writing than the skills model but remains problematic because too much emphasis lies with the importance of representation of meaning.

The Academic Socialisation model is also problematical because of its inherent assumption that learning to write is a matter of straightforward osmosis. The view that writing can be learnt as part and parcel of exposure to writing overlooks the many complexities that are involved in writing (*see* Elbow 2000), and restricts learning to what can be observed (Bruner 1966). For some, this may be a rather inefficient strategy for 'the restricted time frame of a degree programme' (Skillen 2006: 142). For others, it may be seen as inadvertently promoting a process of imitation or 'banking' (Freire 1970) rather a process of meaning-making. Nevertheless, it is a combination of the Skills Model and Academic Socialisation Model that has steered the development of the ways in which writing is supported in UK HEIs (Lillis 2006).

For Ivanic, writing can also be viewed as a creative matter or as a procedural activity. The creativity discourse heralds the virtues of implicit teaching. Writing is seen to be honed not solely through a preoccupation with itself, but is developed in tandem with other expressive skills such as reading (*see* Murray 1993). Instead of a focus on grammar, writing is understood as something that should be applied through creative activities such as writing stories. The creativity discourse resembles most closely the way that Thesen (2013: 116) discusses the importance of allowing 'spontaneity, flow and play' in writing and inviting 'the edge' (Thesen 2014) in postgraduate research writing.

The process discourse, on the other hand, is considered more in relation to the temporal

and systemic approaches to writing such as planning, writing, editing and proofreading. The

process discourse has received quite a revival in recent times with increasing uptake of

Murray-inspired writing retreats amongst academic staff in UK universities (*see* Murray and

Newton 2009).

Ivanic's genre discourse refers more to the varying styles of writing and sees writing as

belonging to different 'text types' such as stories, diaries, reports or blogs. Genres are

standardized by expected practices (*see* Peters 2008) and therefore each text type is

governed by the community rules that are accepted as usual in the respective genre (Hyland

2007). The issue of genre has also provoked some scrutiny as a problematic area for

students learning in interdisciplinary ways: 'pity the poor nursing student, who is required to

write at times like a sociologist, at others like a philosopher, yet again like a scientist and

finally as a reflective practitioner' (Baynham 2000: 17).

For Lea and Street (1998) their third, and significantly, their preferred model, is Academic

Literacies. This model has been mobilized to help capture the more hidden complexities

involved in writing for students within Higher Education. It subsumes both the skills model

and the academic socialization model but extends beyond representation of meaning and

the learning of skills to consider academic writing at the level of epistemology. In this third

view of writing, the process of learning how to write academically not only involves an

appreciation of what knowledge is, how it is built and who builds it, but also demands

students to nuance these views according to the specific requirements of individual

assessments, and to an extent, the preferences of individual lecturers. To this end, Lea and

Street (1998) purport that writing is a social practice that can be seen as 'embedded in networks of culture and power' (Stierer 2000: 181) involving positions of power that are played out over the course of writing. As they sum up, 'a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes' (Lea & Street 1998: 159). In other words, the Academic Literacies view firstly foresees issues of power and authority (Gamache 2002) and secondly, seeks to unpack the complex and muddied stages that students negotiate in order to develop their own writing (Francis, Robson & Read 2001). Therefore, the Academic Literacies agenda is double-pronged in the sense that it aims to both 'acknowledge the importance of critique' and 'work with the notion of design' (Lillis, Harrington, Lea and Mitchell 2015: 10).

From this perspective, a related concern is how multiple demands in writing becomes a confusion for students who are already finding their feet as writers in HE. The practice of 'course switching' (2000: 45) identified by Lea and Street tends to happen as students move from module to module, studying in multi- and interdisciplinary ways, writing across genres (essays, reflective log, blog, *etc*) and adhering to differing and sometimes competing individual lecturer expectations: 'what counts as 'good writing' is therefore partly a matter of the individual preferences of teaching staff, or the individual interpretation by teaching staff of the ostensibly 'given' rules of good writing.' (Lea and Stierer 2000: 4). They go on to add: 'This often leads to considerable variation in the way students are advised to write, despite the persistence of a model of writing based upon universal rules' (Lea and Stierer 2000: 4). The code that students need to crack highlight further the impact 'institutional

relationships of power and authority' (Lea and Street 1998: 157) has on the way writing is practiced from the student point of view.

The social practices discourse that Ivanic (2004) proposes is located within a layer understood as the 'writing event' – a term with coined by Street (1983) in his earlier attempts to make clear the differences between 'event' and 'practices'. The 'writing event' pays particular importance to: 'the broader sociocultural context of writing, the social meanings and values of writing, and issues of power' (Ivanic 2004: 234). In this sense, the context within which writing takes place adds meaning to the way writing becomes viewed and experienced. Writing practices are, therefore, 'socioculturally situated' (Ivanic 2004: 234).

The sociopolitical discourse is located within the layer of 'the sociocultural and political context of writing' (Ivanic 2004: 225). There is synergy with the social practice discourse because both acknowledge how context helps to shape how writing comes to be understood and subsequently practiced. However, the sociopolitical discourse includes context in a much broader sense and refers more to the societal picture with a particular acknowledgment of the political climate. Ivanic's view is that the 'sociopolitical discourse' is an emancipatory one, and is about encouraging writers to be critical active citizens and to ask questions relating to governance and social policy. For Ivanic, understanding and practicing writing without this particular discourse is detrimental and would lead to 'unthinking conformism' (Ivanic 2004: 238).

The groundwork that Ivanic provides in relation to discourses of writing has been extended

more recently through the work of Baker (2017). Baker (2017) suggested that a new

discourse of writing has emerged in relation to Higher Education undergraduate students.

The new discourse is 'characterized by a preoccupation with the way that writing will be

treated/ graded' (Baker 2017 25). Baker's work on assessment preoccupation allies with the

earlier groundwork provided by Norton *et al* (2001) that differentiated between 'meaning

orientation' and 'reproducing orientation' (2001: 274) in student writing. The essay writing

tactics explored by Norton *et al* that fall into the 'reproducing orientation' camp, provides

examples of what the assessment discourse of writing might look like in practice.

3.3 Critiques of Academic Literacies: the paradox of making the implicit explicit

The framework that Lea and Street (1998) have devised in the form of the Academic

Literacies trilogy of models has been criticized for failing to help solve the problems that

they point out (Lea 2004; Lillis 2006; Wingate and Tribble 2012; Strauss 2017). Research in

the academic literacies tradition often call for a new type of pedagogy, without suggesting

what this might look like in practice (Lillis 2003). On that vein, writers such as Hathaway

(2015) and Wingate and Tribble (2012) have suggested that Academic Literacies thinking

should draw from existing knowledge from within composition approaches (largely used in

the US), and English as an Additional language pedagogies. Such cross-fertilization would

avoid the 'either-or view' of Academic Literacies research as distinctively apart from

rhetoric, composition and text-making pedagogies that may aid the Academic Literacies

agenda (Gimenez and Thomas 2015: 30; Wingate 2015). Both EAL and composition studies

traditions claim extensive experience in helping students to unlock the mysteries of writing using established tried and tested methods in this area.

But this may not be an easy fix to pull off. Elton (2010) identified how discipline specific staff do not necessarily have specialized writing expertise and that writing support staff do not necessarily have disciplinary expertise. The outcome for developing frameworks for helping students in their writing in ways that are sensitive to the nuances of Academic Literacies framework are therefore, usually, extremely limited.

However, attempts have been made to develop pedagogies with an Academic Literacies view of writing and more recent works focus on *working with* Academic Literacies to both 'contest' and to 'transform' the student writing environment (Jacobs 2015 133). Of note is Lea's (2004) attempt to provide a template for course design using an academic literacies approach that included efforts to make explicit the implicit nature of writing. The project provided ways for academic staff to approach the issue of writing for assessment within module teaching using particular approaches in the articulation of assessment documentation. However, Lea's findings stumbled upon an impasse in the form of an 'irresolvable tension' (Lea 2004: 750) between what lecturers wanted their students to know about the assessment, and what students gleaned from these staff instruction. The research showed that taking all uncertainty away from student writers was a near impossible task (Fischer 2015). Not knowing how an essay might be graded is an uncertainty that cannot be eradicated without pre-marking writing.

Not knowing how work will be treated is problematic for the students articulated through

Baker's (2017) assessment discourse. No amount of discussion, support or guidance can

assure achieving specific future grades and efforts to do so may encourage an exaggerated

focus on attainment over learning (Badenhorst, Moloney, Dyer, Rosales and Murray 2015).

Perhaps it is in efforts to make crystal clear thinking on student writing, that the academy

contributes to the assessment discourse in ways that might provoke 'reproducing

orientation' (Norton et al 2001: 274) in student writing. In wanting to take away the

uncertainties of writing, there is the danger of trying to remove challenges for students

instead of helping students to manage those challenges. Indeed, efforts made to 'fix'

student writing can end up as a type of 'slippage' towards telling students what to do in

ways that contradicts the Academic Literacies agenda (Street, Lea and Lillis 2015: 389). In

the simplification of writing tasks, through the overprovision of writing guidance, the 'sticky

moments' (Chicota and Thesen 2014: 146) of writing remain unaddressed and

disarticulated.

Fulford (2009) discusses the use of 'writing frames' as one way in which the academy, in its

urge to smooth out the nature of writing, masks the inherent difficult nature of writing.

Writing frames, that essentially provide students with prompts in the form of a highly

structured essay plan, attempt to take away the uncertain nature of writing and to reassure

nervous student writers. For Fulford, writing frames, are in danger of provoking a type of

ventriloquation. In adopting the use of writing frames, students may be encouraged

towards a 'reproducing orientation' (Norton et al 2001: 274) in ways that resemble a cloning

approach to writing what the lecturer has asked them to provide. Such a process seems

incongruent with the more traditional notions of Higher Education learning such as

independent learning, subject knowledge enhancement and developing expertise within a particular discipline. Additionally, writing frames may be viewed as another device to obtain student satisfaction: making writing feel easier so that it feels less unpleasant.

The concerns around the oversimplification of writing tasks can also be understood as counterproductive if by making meaning clearer it undermines the inherent complexities that student writers have to get to grips with. For example, Lea and Street (2006) suggested that colleagues involved in professional development workshops to aid student writers often voiced their worries over simplifying writing. Concerns raised from staff suggested that in an attempt to explicate the implicitness of writing there runs risks in both diluting the complexities and creating inaccuracies in conceptual thinking. Indeed, Elton (2010) posits that one can cannot simply 'say' what the tacit rules in writing are – that is why they are tacit in the first place. Instead, Elton (2010: 158) suggests that a more fruitful approach must include 'a mixture of word and deed'. Hidden power relations, identity work and unpacking disciplinary and institutional preferences in writing cannot be handled alone through dialogue and do better to include the necessary messiness that comes with experience and 'trial and error'.

3.4 Critiques of Academic Literacies: Communities of Practice, or not?

Although Lea and Street have never explicitly likened their Academic Literacies model to Wenger's communities of practice in their original conception of it, there has since been some debate about the extent to which COP is relevant to the social practices of student writers in ways that are relevant to my thesis. Issues of power are at the heart of the social

view of writing. One way of exploring power in writing has tumbled out of the debates around the extent to which student writing as a social practice can be thought about in the same sort of terms as Communities of Practice. Because these debates involve ideas around power, place and position, they lend an important lens to the way student writing can be conceived of from the specific point of view *of the student.*

Essentially, Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice is a learning theory. Learning is seen as taking place in a particular context, or, as Lave and Wenger (1991) say, it is 'situated'. Situated learning is often used to describe the ways in which learning occurs in a professional practice and how learning as a whole can be seen as born out of 'the context of our lived experience of participation in the world' (Wenger 1998: 3). Wenger (1998) has furthered this thinking through the Communities of Practice model. Within it, Wenger (1998) describes how people come to learn by starting out as novices who are located at the 'periphery' of practice and learn the ways of the more experienced practitioners towards the epicentre of a community. It is a process of both becoming and belonging.

In a similar vein, Swales (1990) refers to the 'discourse community' (see also Bazerman 1988; Berkenkotter, Huckin & Ackerman 1989) in order to explain how particular communities develop and communicate with particular ways of saying. The notion of discourse community usefully plugs the way that Wenger's Communities of Practice fails to consider the explicit role of language in their thinking (Evnitskaya and Morton 2011). The term discourse community refers to: 'the linguistic and contextual dimensions of disciplinary knowledge' (Woodward-Kron 2004: 141). In other words, certain ways of saying are legitimated and understood as valid, and other ways of saying are not. In writing, certain

texts containing a particular way of writing - *of expression* - are considered more valid than others. Thus, writing entails situated learning and ways of writing reflect the values and beliefs that are seen as legitimate from within that particular community (Wilson 2000).

'Communities of Practice are everywhere' (Wenger 1998: 6) and thus, not limited to formally constructed groups. Likewise, not all of these communities are intentionally 'joined'. Student writers as a community fall within these ambiguities as neither deliberate nor formal groupings. Yet there is some debate around what groups can constitute a Community of Practice. Communities of Practice represents three dimensions consisting of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger 1998). Critically, communities of practice are a collaborative endeavour in which its members strive for similar goals, share patterns of practice and work unilaterally as opposed to hierarchically. As a result, Haneda (2006) suggests that neither groups of students nor classrooms lend themselves to the Communities of Practice framework, since not all pupils necessarily share the same goals and the teacher-pupil relationship is based upon a hierarchy rather than consensus and mutual aims. In fact, writing, in the context of Higher Education, encompasses hierarchical relationships. The academy is a 'statusful community' (Ivanic 1998: 83) with certain 'gatekeepers' who control what is deemed to be good writing and what is not (Lea and Stierer 2000). The power dynamics relating to writing contribute to a series of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as writing is perpetually judged as worthy or unworthy and, also, to varying extents of 'worthiness' in the form of grading (Lillis 1997). For similar reasons, Ashwin (2009) problematizes the notion that Higher Education students can be seen as belonging to a Community of Practice within the academy. Lecturers are not priming all Higher Education students for an academic career and therefore the lecturer-student

relationship does not translate to the expert-novice model that the Communities of Practice framework is modelled upon.

However, Tapp (2015) asserts that *student writers* can be understood as a Community of Practice. Whilst academic staff may not be enculturating all students into becoming the next generation of academics, they are guiding students towards writing in particular academic ways – ways in which they are expert and students are new to. From this point of view, student writers are engaging in 'peripheral participation in those practices in which tutors participate' (Tapp 2015: 714). As a result, student writers can be seen as a Community of Practice within which they are learning the ropes of writing according to the established practices of the academic community.

Yet, for many undergraduate writers, peripheral participation may still feel hierarchical rather than democratic. Green (2016: 99) discriminates student writing from other types of academic writing as uniquely 'a practice of knowledge display'. Student writing, if for assessment purposes, must demonstrate knowledge and understanding and therefore, is set apart from other types of academic writing. An alternative way of putting it, therefore, is that students writers belong to '*emerging* communities of practice' (Wolff 2013: 85).

Although, even an *emerging* community of practice is notwithstanding students who do not see themselves as budding writers. On this note, it is worth singling out the work of Pittam *et al* (2009) who found that students often reported feeling like editors with little sense of authority rather than as 'writers'. A different way again of viewing student writing as a social practice is to completely disband the notion of communities and replace it with 'spaces'

(Gee 2004). In the way Gee uses the term, spaces mean the places where people interact with each other. The term is not dependent on a sense of belonging, nor on the notion of membership, or even the extent of either of these two tenets. In Gee's words: 'if we start by talking about spaces rather than "communities", we can then go on and ask to what extent the people interacting within a space, or some subgroup of them, do or do not actually form a community' (Gee 2004: 71). These reservations seem appropriate when dealing with the issue of student writing for two reasons. First, student writing as a social practice within the Academic Literacies theoretical framework involves understanding the power imbalance between students and academy staff. The notion of a 'community' with 'members' may be too genteel to capture these power differentials. Second, whether or not, and the extent to which, student writers yearn for authentic belonging to the academy as writers is not clear, and certainly likely to be variable across individual students. The world beyond academia appears so far to have been less focused on in Academic Literacies research (Tydesley 2013).

In unpacking the uses and misuses of the notion of 'communities of practice', it is easier to make clear the ways in which students may reject notions of participation, belonging, becoming and membership when it comes to the act of writing. These sorts of questions are not readily dealt with within the Academic Literacies framework. Academic Literacies, instead, places the focus on the subordination of the student voice. While compelling that 'writing academic assignments causes people to "change their speech", to take on particular identities' (Ivanic 1998: 7), what is less fleshed out within the academic literacies models is how students may, through writing, end up 'not so much learning to be creative as learning to use discourses which already exist – creatively' (Ivanic 1998: 86). And how, by extension,

there exists 'the possibility of students bringing alternative discourses to the academy which might eventually have an effect on its conventions' (Ivanic 1998: 86).

Some 20 years on and a lot is still unclear about the best ways to tackle the issue of student writing (Jacobs 2015). The conundrum of Academic Literacies raises new questions around the difficulties and challenges that arise in attempts to make the implicit explicit in relation to the task of writing for assessment for student writers. The criticisms of the Academic Literacies framework are levied either at the lack of practical solutions or the unsuitability of practical solutions for Academic Literacies thinking. On the one hand, the Academic Literacies framework is successful in providing a 'critical frame' for thinking about student writing in the academy. On the other hand, solutions and strategies continue to be evasive. Thinking through more the debates that have arisen about the appropriateness of communities of practice may hold some clues on where to go next.

3.5 Voice

So far, the emphasis in the discussion has been upon the social and ideological framing of writing – both in general terms (discourses of writing) and in terms directly associated with Higher Education study (Academic Literacies). Whilst these bodies of work provide insight into the way in which writing is contextualized, this alone is not enough to sufficiently theorise aspects of writer agency. As discussed, Academic Literacies theory has been devised, in part, to shed light on the ways academic prose is heavily sculpted by the expectations of the dominant and more powerful academy at discipline, institutional and

individual levels. Therefore, the idea of agency in writing, and how it is particularly limiting for new student writers, is implicitly located within the Academic Literacies model.

The extent to which one writes with agency, by the apparent ability to operate outside of the social and cultural structures within which it is located, can be understood using Bakhtin's (1981) notion of 'voice'. Voice is used to conceptualise utterances within sociolinguistic traditions. Voice, in some ways, can be thought about along the same lines as the tension between structure and agency within sociological debate. Voice does not exist in raw terms. Voice derives meaning from authoritative others who rule over what utterances are deemed as, for example, plausible, convincing, underdeveloped, unworthy. Put simply, 'voice' used in Bakhtinian terms, is the product of the struggle between the rules that restrain and shepherd writing against intentions of individual expression.

Voice, as part of writing, and the extent to which it exists, is further addressed through Ivanic's (1998) use of the Bakhtinian notion of 'ventriloquation'. Within this particular view of writing, writer 'voice' is understood as inherently prone to what Bakhtin refers to as 'heteroglossia' (Vice 1997). That is, all produced texts are derivatives of a complex web of language stratification. There are rules, genres, audiences, ways of speaking (for example, dialects, sociolects, register) and intentions that infiltrate and exist in text-making. Therefore, writer 'voice' is actually 'double-voiced' in the sense that it operates within particular contexts that subsequently shape it (Chatterjee-Padmanabhan 2014: 101) limiting it in such a way that it 'is always someone else's' (Price 2014: 12). Thus, ventriloquation, is 'the mouthpiece for language which is not your own' (Ivanic 1998: 50). As such, writers are

destined to ventriloquate since other voices are assimilated and appropriated into their own, but over time, such voices become internalised and rebalanced in such a way that allows for more authenticity and agency (Murphey 2007). This view of writing has particular resonance for writing in academia in which writing is overtly intertextual and therefore inevitably ''interanimated' by other voices' (Paxton 2014: 151). The interpolation of different writer voices can be a giddy maze for students to navigate. Since ventriloquation is 'only productive for speakers if they can 'reaccent' a given speech genre for their own purposes' (Haworth 1999: 100), it can also serve as rather self-limiting. In the confusion of working out how to write in a particular disciplinary yet interanimated fashion, the balance may be tipped in favour of writing in safe ways that are thought to be desired and accepted as wanted by the academy (Samuelson 2009). When ventriloquation is not sufficiently reaccented then voice may align to something that Ivanic refers to as 'prescriptivism' (Ivanic 1998: 83).

The scope for voice that a writer has can be thought about in relation to Ivanic's theoretical understanding of writer identity. Ivanic suggests four aspects to writer identity. *Very briefly*, three out of the four aspects refer to the actual writing and writer. She calls these aspects the autobiographical self, the discoursal self and self as author. Together, they confer how writing reflects the writer and their origins, and how a writer wishes to sound to others, and how writers are received by others. These three aspects shape and are shaped by the fourth aspect that Ivanic calls 'possibilities for self-hood' (1998: 10). It is this final and particular aspect that Ivanic uses to express the ways in which agency may occur in writing. Ivanic adds that the concept of 'possibilities for self-hood' aims to: 'capture the tension between the freedom people have to identify with particular subject positions through their selection

among discoursal resources, and the socially determined restrictions on these choices'. (Ivanic 1998: 11).

The extent of voice is therefore articulated by Ivanic as a set of possibilities. Lillis usefully summarises possibilities for selfhood in a later text - *as they relate to voice* - by pulling out specific examples: "how scholars enact agency by using the stuff available to them – genres, languages, registers, accents – to make knowledge" (Lillis 2014: 238). The 'stuff available to them' is a useful way to think about the ways in which student writers might experience voice and provides a counter view to the ways in which 'stuff' is *unavailable* to student writers.

3.6 The 'tilting point': capturing the postgraduate and researcher condition

The theoretical contribution of Thesen (2013; 2014) provides a useful lens for delineating between the times when writers express agency and the times when writers tow the line. Voice, as derived from its Bakhtinian sense, has been considered in new ways more recently by Thesen and Cooper (2014) in their edited book: 'Academic Writing and Risk'. Influenced by African literature and postcolonial theory, Thesen (2014) outlines how the notion of risk can be drawn from to articulate 'narratives of loss' (2014: 14). The premise stems from the relatively powerless position of academic writers in the Global South. Thesen points out by way of example that when Giddens, Beck and Douglas discussed risk on an international academic platform in the early 1990s, Mbembe was developing similar ideas in the Global South that did not attract the same of level of interest from the academic community. In so doing, Thesen (2014) claims how writing in academia is replete with power divides across

those who decide what gets published and aired in the international academic domain, and those who are subject to these rules. Thesen and Cooper's (2014) edited collection portrays how this scenario is particularly felt by postgraduate and early career researchers in the Global South.

Thesen (2014) articulates a 'tilting point' within writing to capture the dance between those making the rules and those abiding by the rules in writing. While a tilt between writer and reader is inevitable within the social view of writing (Ivanic 1998), and is congruent with Bakhtin's theory of 'voice', for Thesen, such tilts are problematic because they reflect a power imbalance that privileges the voice of some groups to the cost of others. Therefore, Thesen (2014) manages to pick up on something not addressed in the Academic Literacies framework: 'an account of power-in-literacy which captures the intricate ways in which power, knowledge, and forms of subjectivity are interconnected with 'uses of literacy' in modern, colonial, and postcolonial settings' (Collins and Blot 2005: 66). In this sense, risk curbs voice in a way that prompts Thesen to stress one important point: 'when voices do not carry as hoped, we must ask why' (2014: 6). Of course, Thesen's context of the Global South with its colonial and apartheid histories, has definite and particular reasons for calling out the domination of the Global North within academia. The issue of student writing in the UK HE sector, on the other hand, is clearly not to the same scale or significance as global inequalities in academic voice. But there are aspects of what Thesen discusses that can be applied to explore how student writers weigh up what to write and what not to. To consider the applicability of Thesen's work to the context of undergraduate writing, it is probably useful to discuss some key terms that Thesen uses to help convey the notion of a 'tilting

point' in writing. They are: the postgraduate condition, centripetal forces, centrifugal forces and risk.

Thesen's describes the 'the postgraduate condition' as 'a predicament, a pervasive state in which one lives with contradictions over time' (2014: 7). The conflict refers to the 'condition' of needing to be original on the one hand, and succumbing to conventions on the other in a way that locates postgraduate and early career researchers between their own rock and hard place. It is the tension of being at once working alone and working with a supervisor. It is the struggle of breaking new ground while making it in an established community. These contradictions are exacerbated, in particular, within the Global South where writers are also 'anglicised yet not English' (Thesen 2014: 7).

Explicating how the postgraduate condition manifests in the psyche of writers, Thesen introduces what she calls 'centrifugal forces' and 'centripetal forces'. To understand these terms it is important to return briefly back to Bakhtin. As we know, Bakhtin sees language as heteroglossic: 'a site of struggle that forges a link between the individual and the social that exist at the point of articulation on the edge between the two' (Thesen 2014: 5-6). One way of describing the 'struggle' between the social and the individual is in the dominant 'pull' of one over the other. Thesen calls 'the centripetal forces' as 'pulls towards convention' (2014: 6). By contrast, 'centrifugal forces' are aspects of voice that appear to be more 'hybrid, experiential' and more broadly, 'pushes away from the centre' (Thesen 2014: 6). Thesen's interest is in what happens next - and I quote in length to help capture more fully the spirit of her argument:

'Did the meanings that the writer had in mind see the light of day, or were they filtered out during the writing process, either because the writer did not want to risk exposing an unusual style (perhaps more colloquial, or blended) or unusual subject matter (references to experience, to research designs that went wrong)? Or did the writer choose to hold back what might have been said and instead take the path of least resistance?' (Thesen 2014: 6).

Like Beck and Giddens, Thesen understands risk as productive in the sense that it qualitatively shapes experience. Thesen uses the notion of 'warm risk' to capture the experiential aspects of risks for writers in Higher Education. Thesen sums up how the 'lived world of researchers' (Thesen 2014: 12) involves what they will and will not write as part of the 'tilting point'. The notion of 'warm risk' is defined by Thesen by its contrast to McWilliam's (2009) reference to 'cold risk'. Like Thesen, McWilliam uses risk as a blanket term to describe the characteristics of modern life in the Higher Education sector. McWilliams articulates HEIs as 'risk organisations' (McWilliam 2009: 192) that she sees as increasingly bound by the business of 'risk management'. However, while McWilliam's focus is on identifiable and measurable 'cold' risks, Thesen's interest is in the way risk can 'illuminate hidden dimensions of decision making, feeling and morality in relation to writing' (Thesen 2014: 10). In particular, risk creates writing experiences as 'the tilting point between self and other' (Thesen 2014: 15) leading to what gets written and what gets silenced away.

It is within the notion of: 'the tilting point between self and other' (Thesen 2014: 15) that an understanding of risk and voice can be reimagined for undergraduate writers. The undergraduate student body clearly do not share the same oppression in the way that the Global South do, but the power differences between student and lecturing staff are well

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documented (Lea and Street 1998; Lea and Street 2000; Lea and Stierer 2000; Ivanic 1998).

Writing for assessment creates its own predicaments. Student writers have to make decisions on what to include and what not to include, in ways that might provoke uncertainty around what might happen if I include this or what might happen if I don't include that? These predicaments for student writers in UK HEIs are framed more widely by the socio-economic uncertainties of life (double-dip recession, unaffordable housing, zero-hour contracts), and a high-stakes high-cost higher education culture.

Undergraduate student writing can be seen as potentially spurred on by what Thesen refers to as centrifugal forces – influences that steer towards self-expression, a desire to be creative and original and towards pushing boundaries. In other ways, the shape of writing may come about from the more centripetal forces at play such as inclinations towards writing with writing frames, using exemplars, referring very precisely and rigidly to writing guidance and assignment criteria. To put it another way, undergraduate writers may be lured to writing for expression and discovery, but weigh up such approaches against the practicalities and strategic benefits of 'falling into line'. This is *the undergraduate* version of getting stuck between a rock and a hard place: a choice between towing the line or risking grades in today's shaky economic climate within one of the world's most expensive Higher Education system.

It seems useful to reiterate here how Lillis summarised the ideas relating to the 'tilting point' - *as they relate to voice* - by pulling out specific examples of: 'how scholars enact agency by using the stuff available to them – genres, languages, registers, accents – to make knowledge' (Lillis 2014: 238). The 'stuff available to them' is one way to think about the ways in which student writers may experience the centrifugal nature of writing, in terms of

how they might perceive or consider their own sense of agency as writers within the academy. Contrastingly is a sense of voice that is determined more by the centripetal forces at play, or, 'the pull to the centre', such as assessment guidance, learning outcomes and assessment criteria (Ecclestone 1999). For example, Baker (2017), Read et al (2001) and Norton *et al* (2001) have provided accounts for why student writers may be positioned and encouraged to write in 'safe' and assessment-driven ways. The question this leaves open is what might this be like from the student point of view, and the extent to which *the undergraduate condition* is becoming a bit like being stuck between a rock and a hard place: tailor writing to what they want or risk your grades.

3.7 Summary of chapter

Academic Literacies provides an all-encompassing theoretical understanding of student writing as a social practice. Lea and Street's (1998) contribution captures the ways in which student writing involves ideological notions of power differences between staff and student in ways that demarcates how writing is experienced. Students learn conventions and become attuned to 'course-switching' so that they can navigate the demands of student writing depending on the discipline, institution and even individual preferences. The 'critical frame' (Street 2009) leaves some stones unturned as questions are still raised over what pedagogies might resolve student writing issues and to what extent, student writing can be considered as an example of Wenger's (1998) 'communities of practice'. More notable in relation to my own research is the matter of writer agency. Bakhtin offers a way to think about agency in writing and informs the more recent works put forward by Thesen and

Cooper (2014). To this end, the final section of the theoretical framework delved deeper

into the ways that Thesen understands the relationship between 'voice' and 'risk' by

exploring the ways in which writing is liberated and restrained via 'the tilting point'.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The start of my thesis sets out my interest in deepening my understanding of how student writers balance out the competing narratives of Higher Education, and what this means for understanding writing in current climatic conditions. The literature review further probed the writing environment along the lines of support, provision and practice; intentions and motivations; and the risks and challenges of writing. My theoretical framework, as presented in chapter 3, draws from an Academic Literacies theoretical framework nested within New Literacy traditions in order to provide a conceptual basis for my research. My own study is a small-scale qualitative piece of research that recruits semi-structured interviews with the sum of 20 participants across one pilot study and a subsequent substantive study. The data generated from the two stages of the study are combined during the iterative stages of data analysis. I used a thematic network approach with an additional sensitivity placed on the spontaneous use of metaphorical language expressed by the students I talked to.

4.2 Methodological approach

Research is generally understood as an endeavour that is undertaken according to the research paradigm within which it is located (Neuman 2003). In turn, the research paradigm is understood as broadly constituted both from the ontological and epistemological position

of the research. Both the ontological position and the epistemological position are driven by the research question, which tends to contain inbuilt assumptions about how the world is and how it can be understood (Rugg and Petre 2007). The ontological position of the research refers to how the nature of the research question is determined by an underlying understanding of the nature of reality. The epistemological position of the research, by extension, refers to how knowledge can be gained and claimed. The ontological position implies the epistemological position since the way reality is understood dictates the ways in which reality can be turned into knowledge about how things are in the world.

My own research aim was: '*to explore how student writing is understood, viewed and experienced by student writers within the varying and sometimes competing narratives of Higher Education in a consumer-led Higher Education sector*'. My research aim was thus concerned with the subjective accounts of student writers in order to see things from their point of view. As a result, in order to answer my question, I sought to explore student views, opinions and accounts of their own experiences. The need to talk to students about their views and experiences of writing suggests that there will not be one single experience and set of views that would provide me with a single answer. In talking to students about their writing, one would expect to encounter varied multiple views, feelings, opinions and accounts of experiences relating to writing. Therefore, the ontological position of my research and research question is generated from understanding reality as fluid and changeable, varied and multiple, as well as context-bound. Consequently, my epistemological position takes the view that, to understand the multiple and subjective realities of different student writers, it is necessary to take an interpretative approach to

research. Thus, in order to answer my research question, I adopted an interpretative methodological approach.

4.2.1 Epistemological traditions in Academic Literacies

Academic Literacies research is also interpretative. The thrust of academic literacies is to reveal the complexities that exist within writing that have previously been overlooked from the student point of view. Therefore, the developing and ongoing work in Academic Literacies pivots on talking to students about their experiences and views on writing.

More specifically, Academic Literacies research takes from the ethnographic tradition in its approach. Ethnography has roots in anthropological research and is traditionally associated with immersive fieldwork within which the researcher gets as close to community traditions, practices, and ways of living as possible in order to cultivate a deep knowledge of the cultural make-up in a given setting or population. As a result, 'ethnography has made a significant contribution to our understanding of participants' worlds, their cultures and sub-cultures' (Bhatti 2017: 85). However, ethnography is also used as a term to describe qualitative research in general that ultimately leads to and provides what Geertz (1973) infamously called 'thick description'. Brewer (2000) usefully distinguishes between 'big' and 'small' ethnography to help tease out the differences in the way ethnography is referred to. 'Small' ethnography, Brewer explains, can be thought of as containing a specific emphasis on research involving fieldwork that attempts to generate deep and discrete foci of populace culture found in anthropological studies. 'Big' ethnography, on the other hand, can be understood as referring to the broader use of qualitative approaches designed to

reveal the details of social life. It is within this second understanding of the ethnographic tradition that Academic Literacies research takes its lead.

Ethnographic research used in Academic Literacies research has attempted to go beyond 'thick description' and to also unpack the tacit assumptions built into writing within academia. The specific focus of Academic Literacies research is to reveal in particular what this is like from the student point of view who is a newcomer into the academy and therefore, often novice in the subtle requirements of what it takes to write well in academic terms. In this sense, the Academic literacies tradition can also be seen as efforts to make 'the familiar strange' (Bhatti 2017: 87). In other words, research using the theoretical frame of Academic Literacies often aims to unmask the implicit complexities of student writing that are taken-for-granted as straightforward and transparent.

My research shares some key similarities with the Academic Literacies agenda, and seeks to address one pressing matter raised by the question: 'how can theory and practice from Academic Literacies be used to open up debate about writing and language at institutional and policy levels?' (Lillis, Harrington, Lea and Mitchell 2015: 4). One fundamental commonality is the shared view that writing is a social practice that is shaped by wider socio-cultural happenings. Therefore, writing is an activity that can be understood as an undertaking that goes beyond a simple skill. Furthermore, developing writing requires more than transparently and straightforwardly 'learning the ropes'. But additionally, my research aims to try and highlight how the progressive changes in social policy that shape Higher Education, can also impinge on writing. Therefore, writing is not only subject to disciplinary, individual and even institutional differences – but that writing as a social practice is also

informed by social policy and socio-cultural factors (such as, for example, the introduction and hike of tuition fees). In other words, as Higher Education policy evolves, subtle changes may filter through to how students think about and approach writing. These policy changes bring scope for Academic Literacies research to be carried out in light of the increasingly prominent consumer logic and employability narratives of Higher Education for undergraduate students (Neculai 2015). In this sense, student writing has tacit aspects – although seemingly *familiar and inherently knowable*, there may be things to explore around how social policy development changes certain aspects of student writing.

Other research in relation to the issue of student writing has described itself as influenced and shaped by the phenomenological approach (*see* Tyldesley 2013). Phenomenology is also located within the interpretative research paradigm due to the need to take a qualitative view to what Husserl (1931) articulated as describing the 'essence' of a particular happening. In other words, researchers are required to develop a description on the particular factors that are involved in making something just so. The need to describe the 'just so' or 'essence', thus, requires an interpretative lens.

An important aspect of phenomenology is the focus on the 'lived experience'. The approach involves coming to understand what it was like to live through something – be it an event, a set of circumstances or a particular moment in time. In other words, phenomenology is about recall and recollection, and tends to be retrospective in nature. Phenomenology is not the study of what might constitute the present time or individual perspectives and therefore is not used in research that explores perceptions, opinions or beliefs.

My own research centres upon the views and opinions of student writers. Whilst there is also a retrospective element – in the sense that the students I talked to were asked about their experiences – this was not a distinctive focus of my research. Also, within the ethnographic tradition of academic literacies research, there usually involves some sort of analysis of text, often with the student writers in order to get a better insight into student lives, views and experiences. Again, my study did not include any text analysis. Instead my research gave pre-eminence to what is widely referred to as 'student voice'. Student voice can be understood, among many other things, as the expression that students provide when being asked for a response in relation to aspects about their Higher Education experience (Seale 2013). Student Voice in this sense is often the yardstick that is used in the consumer-led Higher Education system during module evaluations and through National Student Surveys. Therefore, there seemed to be some merit in asking for views without having a conversation directed at their written work.

To this end, my research approach sits neither neatly within the phenomenology tradition nor with the ethnographic tradition. My research approach is better understood as a small-scale qualitative approach and resembles mostly the work carried by Read *et al* (2001). In Read *et al's* (2001) research, students were contacted by telephone in order to talk to them about their views of writing and their writing experiences. In my own research, I have similarly carried out a small scale qualitative research drawing from in-person semi-structured interviews with students. Because my research is best understood as a small scale qualitative project involving semi-structured interviewing, it is therefore useful to consider the merits of interviewing and the epistemological assumptions about the way interview data is generated.

4.2.2 Interviews

Conducting effective interviews is not a straightforward task and, on one level, can be seen as something of a refined skill for the seasoned researcher (Oppenheim 1992). Broadly speaking, an interview can be understood as 'a conversation with a purpose' (Robson 1993: 228) and seen as particularly useful for 'research questions that can be answered through interviewing commonly address matters of what or how related to lived experience' (Mears 2017: 184).

Interviews are the proverbial bread and butter of qualitative research. Whilst a fundamental and highly contributory research method in qualitative enquiry, interviewing still has attracted some criticism as a research method tool. Oakley (1981) suggested that interviews are often a throwback to the research era mainly shaped by positivist thinking in which the world is seen as measurable encompassing pre-existing social facts for the researcher to go and 'collect'. However, increasingly the interview is seen as an inevitable co-construction of data between the researcher and the researched (Mann 2016) and the persistence of interviewing within qualitative research approaches certainly suggests that there are fundamental benefits to researching with interviews. One guiding beacon for my own research that pinpoints the value that interviews offer, is found in the below quote:

'…the interview provides what the observation cannot – insight into the mental processing of the interviewee. Interviews can therefore be viewed as useful for getting information that

would unlikely be accessed through other means – such as observations and questionnaires'

(Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 1996: 153)

However, there are also more specific criticisms of interviews employed as a *sole* method of data collection within the Academic Literacies research tradition. Lillis (2008), for example, suggested that interviews only offer glimpses of what students understand their writing experiences to be. To counteract the limitations of interviews, many academic literacies researchers either conduct in-depth interviewing in order to see interviewees on more than one occasion to glean richer data (Taylor and Bogden 1998), or extracts of written work is examined in conjunction with or during the interviews.

As such, Academic Literacies influenced research often adopts the use of 'elicitation devices' (Johnson and Weller 2002). Elicitation devices are used in interviews as a talking piece to encourage participants to open up and aid in the potential problem of helping participants to overcome an unwillingness to talk (Adler and Adler 2005). Elicitation devices can mean participants bringing with them to an interview what they see as relevant materials or artefacts that might contribute to the interviewers understanding of their subjective experiences, views or beliefs. For example, Burnett *et al* (2006) used shoeboxes as prompts to help the interviews they had with children about literacy. The children were encouraged to fill their shoeboxes with props ahead of the interview that they themselves associated with their own home-based literacies. Tyldesley (2013) followed suit with her research on academic literacies and invited participants to bring with them to the interviews objects or images that had resonance with their wider experiences of studying for undergraduate degrees.

Green and Somerville (2015: 836) talked more recently about elicitation devices as 'material expression'. In their research, the term was used to talk about photographs that denoted teachers' sustainability education practice in their research. Green and Somerville argued that providing something visible – more than dialogue – brings the research to life and, critically, dialogue becomes anchored via material forms.

As well as stimulating dialogue, there are other reasons why elicitation devices may be used in interviews and have been seen as particularly useful within academic literacies research. One reason is to empower interviewees. Banks (2008) discusses visual research as a way to use images as talking pieces to help recall and prompt discussions. As such, images become a third party to the research interview and therefore can be used as a means to help neutralise power imbalances. In identifying own props ahead of the interviews, interviewees are empowered to set the agenda a little more in relation to what gets talked about, and how, during the interview. Gauntlett (2007) suggested that interviewees bringing something with them of their choosing, gives them time to think and time to work out what is most important to them to highlight. Bartlett (2007) suggests that materials can help people to feel more literate and this is illustrated well in Bagnoli's (2009) research in which the participants were asked to draw responses.

There were several reasons why I did not include the use of elicitation devices in my own research. My own research was not with my own students or with a particular course that I had access to. Therefore, the power imbalance of the interviews that I undertook during the data collection phase of my research can be seen as much less pronounced than in some

Academic Literacies influenced research (*see* Street 2009; Lea 2004; Gimenez 2012; Lillis 1997; Stockall and Cole 2016). As such, the need to negate the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee was lessened. Furthermore, my status as an 'outsider' could also be viewed as in some ways advantageous in the potential for letting students feel able to safely open up to a complete stranger (Vincent 2013).

Secondly, my research questions dictated the need to have a broad, open conversation with students about writing in order to address the push and pull factors that they may encounter within a consumer-led system. In some ways, I wanted to challenge the notion of 'glimpses'. Whilst elicitation devices offer focus, on the flip-side, focus may produce a narrowing effect. Therefore, in order to tap into general feelings around writing – feelings and views that students are left with when they are not writing – it seemed appropriate also to move away from anchored discussions. Therefore, I used the notion of 'glimpses' in a different way and in my research, I placed value on and actively seek out the 'glimpses' that stay with students as instances that have become seen as notable, stand-out and that come to the fore in discussions about writing. To put it another way, 'glimpses' can be seen as the lasting impression or the residual traces of what is remembered and thought about most retrospectively.

4.2.3 Metaphors

The use of metaphors as a research tool can be traced back to Black (1979) and his assertion that language is intricately connected to perception, and earlier, to Wittgenstein's (1953) view that metaphors symbolically reveal innermost thoughts and beliefs. Wallace also

suggests that the value of addressing metaphors in data is two-tiered: 'metaphors illuminate not only the thing described – the role, the institution, the examination – but also throw light on how we conceive of it' (2003: 101). It is this second depth, of trying to access conception, that has proved helpful in the articulation of the significance of my data.

Thus, metaphors may contain important subtexts, or 'value judgements' (Wallace 2003: 101), about the way we view life and hold taken-for-granted views about how things should be. Examples are found in how Bowles and Gintis (1976) talked about the learning process as being reduced to 'a jug' and 'a mug', or how William Butler Yeats (as cited in Moore 2010) encouraged us to see education as 'lighting a fire'. The metaphors used in these cases denote meaning beyond the words used. In the case of 'the jug and mug' principle, it is implied that learning is passive. In the case of 'lighting a fire', a new beginning and a setting free is implied. Yet metaphors and metaphorical speech often occur organically and without much deliberation and therefore can contain hidden gems in relation to what meaning was trying to be conveyed in a particular response.

In my own analysis, I noticed that students sometimes intuitively used metaphorical language to capture a sentiment or evoke certain feelings. For example, one students talked about 'the alien lands of academic writing'. In this instance, the student is using figurative speech in order to highlight the distance between academic writing and normal, everyday life in the assertion that academic writing is alien (i.e. different) and in another land (i.e. foreign).

Caution, however, was necessary in defining what counts as a metaphor and metaphorical and what does not. Some metaphors can be understood as 'dead' when usage has become so commonplace that the metaphorical element of the metaphor has been made redundant (Wallace 2003). The metaphors that are explored and discussed, therefore, are ones that

contain 'a non-literal image' (Gurney 1995), implicitly or explicitly, and contain the 'figurative' to explain the 'literal' (Forceville 2007: 17). My interest in metaphor and metaphorical speech was when they were used without prompt in order to convey meaning about a particular element of writing specifically, or studying and/or being at University broadly (in a way that had relevance to writing). In this sense, my data analysis was not driven by concerns with metaphors and metaphorical speech but rather, I paid attention to metaphors *as and when they arose* in the data as a supplementary mechanism to help support the data analysis process.

4.3 Research Design

The research was carried out in two stages. Firstly, I conducted a pilot study to help me explore the potential themes that might arise in interviews with students in the current climate of Higher Education, from across a range of courses, and distinctly within a pre-1992 environment.

The second stage was the substantive study. The substantive study involved further interviews with more students from across a range of courses and also distinctly within a pre-1992 context. The questions were fine-tuned following the pilot study to ensure that time spent with participants was maximised by allowing me to talk in detail and with wide coverage with the students who I met. The data from both stages have been used in the data analysis.

In order to scaffold my research aim…

to explore how student writing is understood, viewed and experienced by student writers within the varying and sometimes competing narratives of Higher Education in a consumer-led Higher Education sector.

…I was guided by the following three research questions:

- How do student writers negotiate the longstanding ethos of discovery and knowledge advancement against the newer versions of Higher Education endorsing individual gain?

- How are differing and sometimes competing narratives reconciled by student writers (if at all) in terms of the way they view, experience and approach writing?

- How do students negotiate the difficulties in writing *but also* what do they see as the pleasures and privileges, if any, in writing?

4.3.1 The pilot study

A pilot study was conducted as an explorative device during the initial stages of my research (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001). The pilot study consisted of four semi-structured one-to-one interviews, originally designed to test the applicability of what was initially envisioned as a Bourdieuian framework in making sense of student experiences of academic writing. All of the interviews were with current undergraduate University students. The original aim was to

speak to students only from Social Science and Humanities disciplines. These subject areas were specifically identified at the time as the ones most likely to give pre-eminence to assessment formats that were reliant upon academic writing. However, I decided to widen my sampling criteria when the opportunity to talk to a student studying Chemistry arose. I also wanted to harness undergraduate perspectives in particular, as opposed to postgraduate views, to capture student acculturation into the academy.

A 'call for respondents' message was advertised through a University-managed Facebook page. One interviewee responded to this call. One other respondent volunteered through a mutual friend, and from this two of her student housemates also volunteered to take part in my pilot study. Effectively, my sampling employed a snowballing approach (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). As suggested previously, I chose to conduct my research in a HE context away from my normal place of work to reduce the issues of power between myself and my interviewees. All participants were strangers to me, and therefore unlikely to come into contact with me on a professional basis. Respondents received information about my study and consent forms in advance of it, and then again prior to the interview taking place. Interviews were arranged to take place at a time and location convenient to interviewees. Interviews were recorded on a dictation machine and later transcribed. Grounded Theory data analysis was applied to the data and through a system of open, axial and selective coding (see Flick 2002). Respondents were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and are therefore referred to as Veronica, Belinda, Helen and Marley. The pilot study revealed three potential emerging themes: game-playing, study skills for weak students and the importance of alternative sources of support. I provide participant profiles below:

Table 1:

Participants Profiles in the Pilot Study	
Belinda	2nd year student studying Psychology and Criminology. Took a gap year. Her subjects require her to write a lot as part of the assessment. Sees herself as quite academic. Enjoys researching for an essay – always wants to research more than there is time for. Achieved firsts in her first year but grades had dipped in year two. Generally confident about ability to write but admitted to worrying a lot about her writing. Endeavoured to always try her best. Attended workshops in year 1 which she found helpful. Has found less need for this sort of thing in year 2 and felt that it is introductory help. Uses peer support informally and less likely to ask staff for help (sees some as okay with providing help but others reluctant as too busy). Felt less prepared for more unusual genres of writing and would welcome support to help with the more non-traditional assessments.
Helen	2nd year student studying Chemistry. Helen had attended a grammar school where there was a lot of expectations that students would go on to University. However, Helen felt that she came from a family that wasn't very academic and felt as if she has little pressure from home to do well in Higher Education. Helen suggested that her marks ranged but had averaged out to a 2:1. She seemed happy to simply pass her essays. She had a relaxed approach to writing. She felt her time management could be better, and that the more research you had done, the better placed you were for writing. She said she wasn't likely to use support systems for writing issues unless she had a specific issue she wanted addressing.
Marley	Marley was a second year student studying Psychology and Criminology. Her schooling was in South Africa, at a prestigious school in Cape Town where writing was taken very seriously. Marley took some Open University modules before applying to University. Many of her assignments required written work which Marley felt was a fair way of assessing engagement and understanding. Marley was achieving 2:1 and First marks. Marley had a positive relationship with writing. She had received feedback suggesting that she needed to be less biased – although Marley saw that the essay she was writing about was in relation to South Africa which she felt she had some authority on. Marley felt that study skills workshops were not for her and spoke of how she would want to get input from academic staff who were respected in the field.

	Marley also expressed quite vehemently that there were inconsistencies in marking and that students were fobbed off when enquiring about these sorts of issues.
Veronica	Veronica was a final year student studying Law and Politics. Veronica enjoyed writing and had a positive relationship with writing. She saw a distinct difference between writing for Law and writing for politics. Veronica enjoyed doing research in preparation for writing. She saw that this ensured a broad knowledge base that was useful for the future. Veronica felt that she sometimes went off on a tangent in her writing, when she stumbled upon research that she found interesting and wanted to 'use' in her essays. Veronica felt that she had, in the past, coasted, but now worked 'properly'. She was on track for a 2:1 and was confident about achieving this. She explained how she wanted to get at least one first so that she could be proud of achieving a first for one of her assignments. When this happened she circulated the information and got 100 likes on Facebook. Veronica was active in the Students' Union, and felt that she would leave University as a distinctive graduate – with a 2:1 and experience. She felt this was better than only doing academic work and achieving a first. Veronica had early memories of her own mother doing a degree and felt that these had motivated her a lot. She referred to her mum for help in writing and considered that it must be difficult for students who did not have this sort of help available to them at home.

4.3.2 Preliminary insights from the pilot study

The pilot study outlined some initial themes that were helpful in developing the interview schedule for the remaining interviews. The focus shifted away from what was originally viewed as a Bourdieuian lens towards the possible 'risks' that were potentially linked to writing. As the study developed, the notion of risk was rationed in order to articulate, accommodate and integrate the sorts of things that students talked about in the interviews across the substantive phase of the research. Initial codings that were originally identified in

relation to the themes of game-playing, study skills for weak students and the importance of alternative sources of support, contribute to the final themes of writing freedoms, writing controls and writing efficacies.

4.3.3 The Substantive Study

My field research at the substantive stage was also based at a pre-1992 university – the place where I was once a student myself and the place where my early insights into the complexities of student writing were formed. Aside from being privy to its 'institutional habitus' (Reay, David & Ball 2005), conducting research here offered several advantages. On one level it was the practical choice: I had ready-made contacts and a good degree of access. On another level, it was an ethical choice. Participating interviewees would not come into contact with me on an everyday professional basis and vice versa. The same could not be said if the research was conducted at my place of work.

4.3.4 Sampling

The sampling was purposive but drawing upon snowballing sampling techniques. I used purposive sampling in the sense that I identified a particular sample population (undergraduate students), 'in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011: 156). As a targeted group, it was not a random sample but the privileging of depth in qualitative methodology often offsets notions of randomisation (Flick 2002). Additionally, the value in research is not

uniformly judged by its reliability and potential for generalisation, but is also based upon what Wolcott (1994: 113) suggests as the 'capacity for generalisation'. That is, research findings in one piece of research may be of interest to others by dint of the similarity in the context or population. Thus, it is the potential for generalisation in situations that share some sort of 'context similarity' (Larsson 2009) with the research undertaken that provides a certain applicability.

The sampling started with an open call to students who fit the profile through the use of posters, emails and online social media. Therefore, initially the approach was 'volunteer sampling' as students were asked to self-select for participation. As participants emerged, I used a snowballing method to widen access to potential participants. This was a useful technique for an 'outsider researcher' attempting to gain access to an existing community (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). In so doing, the aim was not to accrue a representative sample but to exploit the differences that emerged as part of the process (Flick 2002). The sample size was determined by the nature of the research question (Silverman 2013) in correspondence to the point of 'theory saturation' or, in other words, 'until you know that you have a picture of what is going on and can generate an appropriate explanation for it' (Mason 1996: 97).

The students who responded and the others who had agreed to meet with me as a result of the snowballing approach, came from a range of undergraduate courses. Unlike the original aim taken within the pilot study to target Social Science and Humanities students, the substantive study started as an open call to any student of any discipline that required them to write. This was a conscious change in my approach following both the serendipitous change

of course within the pilot study and from discussions after paper presentations with colleagues about my work in progress. Frequently, academic colleagues from other disciplinary areas outside of the Humanities and Social Sciences felt that the nature of the research was particularly applicable to their own students. Many colleagues from scientific backgrounds suggested that their students had not been expected to write much at A-Level stage, and therefore often struggled coming to grips with the more substantial requirement of writing at Higher Education level. Collecting data from students studying across a variety of courses echoes the research approaches conducted by other research within the academic literacies tradition and research about the matter of student writing (*see* Lea and Street 1998; Hyland 2002; Baker 2017). The only disciplinary areas that seemed to be outside the remit of student writing, therefore were the disciplines of Mathematics and Music.

Students were also from different academic years although four of the participants were newly made graduates and thus, had already completed their degree courses. Interviewing recently-made graduates as well as current undergraduate students about writing views and experiences is a known sampling approach used in similar studies (*such as* Fenton-O'Creevy and Van Mourik 2016), and a deliberate way of allowing students to be able to speak more freely about their writing experiences (*see* Read, Francis and Robson 2001; Rai and Lillis 2013).

The range and array of my students and their circumstances are provided below as pen portraits. I have provided a brief overview of each student in order to help contextualise the data analysis chapters:

Table 2:

Participant Profiles in the Substantive Study	
Amelia	Amelia was a 1st year student studying Law. She was a returning student having worked for a couple of years before going back to studying full-time. She had a positive and straightforward relationship with writing. She felt that her expression was something that could be developed but that largely she understood what to do and what was expected of her. Amelia wasn't afraid to ask for help if she did not understand something or if she was unsure of what she was being asked to do. Amelia wanted at least a 2:1 grade, and found that many of her cohort in Law wanted either a 2:1 or First. She found that grades were often very important to her fellow classmates because of the restrictions of what some might experience if they didn't achieve a high enough grade. In sum, Amelia felt well supported in writing.
Brenda	Brenda was a first year student studying Adult Nursing. She has to partake in academic writing for the theoretical modules relating to nursing but elsewhere her degree has a more vocational element and involves practical activities. Brenda appeared to have a straightforward relationship with writing. The way she talked about writing appeared that it was her organised approach to writing that made writing a relatively easy process. Brenda talked about given herself enough time, starting early, writing a plan or checklist and ticking off what she had done on her list. The practical steps she put in place for herself posed a sort of feel of 'progress' which she found reassuring. Brenda acknowledged the step from college to University was substantial and that more could be done to manage a big leap in writing demands (but not necessarily at HE level). Brenda had a strategy to aim for over 50% in general which she saw as achievable and well above the pass/fail threshold. She wanted a 2:1 overall. However, Brenda confirmed that she probably wouldn't need that sort of mark for her nursing (and that therefore others within her cohort aimed for a pass), but that it was important to her for personal satisfaction.
Erin	Erin was a final year student studying Social Work. She had a more negative account of her writing experiences stemming from a series of failed essays in her second year. Erin recounted how she failed three essays in the same period of her year two studies and as a result was withdrawn from the course. Erin appealed the decision, following a meeting student support services that indicated she had dyslexia. Based on this new evidence, Erin was able to claim for extenuating circumstances and was registered back onto the course. Erin repeated her year 2 studies and was able to access bespoke dyslexia support. Her experiences left her

	with some anxiety around her writing making assessments and waiting for grades to be revealed, particularly stressful times. She also said she felt a little bit bitter. Erin spoke about the perceived inconsistencies that she had witnessed in the way work was marked by lecturers, the guidance that was offered by academic staff and the degree to which lecturers seemed approachable. Erin wanted a 2:2 – a grade that she saw as strides ahead of failing (her earlier experiences) and enough to pursue a career in Social work.
Gayle	Gayle was a second year student studying Physics and Business Management. She felt that she had to do a lot of writing for her course but that the type of writing was different for each subject. Overall, Gayle found that it was important to be evaluative and therefore made a very conscious effort to make all of her writing evaluative. Gayle was pretty confident about writing so long as she had enough time to dedicate to writing. Gayle wasn't sure if a degree was entirely necessary although felt that over the course of the lifespan it would probably be better to have a degree than to be without one. She thought about the applicability of writing to the workplace and found that sometimes researching particular companies and businesses might be useful in her future during job interviews and the like. Gayle talked about using assessment guidance. She found them useful, but insisted that there was hidden criteria that you were expected to match in your writing. Gayle appeared confident in her ability to write in accordance to criteria that was shared with students and criteria that was hidden from students. Gayle also mentioned that there were inconsistencies across the way people marked, and how it would be dangerous to request a re-mark on work in case it came back with a lower grade.
Ivy	Ivy studied Psychology and Media Communications and was a recent graduate (within 6 months of finishing her degree). Ivy recalled differences in the way she was expected to write for her two disciplines, but overall had very positive memories of writing. Ivy in particular enjoyed the challenge of writing. She felt that with enough organisation and planning, she could take to writing fairly straightforwardly. She reflected on a couple of areas – her ability to write concisely, and her ability to not overwrite, in her word: 'flower my words'. She occasionally compared her ability to write in concise ways to other people who bragged about maxing out on their word counts. Ivy often used the phrase 'what they are looking for' and appeared to have developed a confident sense in producing work that she thought was expected of her. Ivy recalled one particular module that her whole cohort received low marks for the writing they had done – this caused upset across the group and there was a sense of 'blame' apportioned to the School of Psychology. However, Ivy felt this was addressed in a lecture and

	things settled down pretty swiftly after, and that this was a turning point for many to recognise that writing at University level was quite difficult.
Jade	Jade did History and Business Management before transferring to a History and Education course. When I interviewed Jade she was a recent graduate (within 6 months), and therefore was speaking retrospectively about her writing experiences. Jade had mixed feelings about writing. Jade enjoyed writing creatively and found that academic writing was sometimes a little stifling. She talked at length about one particular instance when she disagreed with a lecturer about free schooling. She felt put down about her views in the seminar discussion, and as a result, had to write something that she disagreed with in order to pass the module. This episode had stuck with her as a more negative experience and seemed to fuel some wider views that when you wrote in the academy, you basically have to mirror the wants and desires of the particular lecturer marking the work. Jade did have more favourable experiences. She liked writing tasks with more creative qualities. Other writing she found tedious and as a result would delay writing to the point that she would have little time left to devote to the task. Times like this she found quite stressful. Jade occasionally talked about writing skills as transferable skills useful for the world of work. She wanted a 2:1 because she saw a 2:2 as 'shameful' due to a perceived reaction of her mother, and thought a 1st would take more dedication than she was willing to give.
Jimmy	Jimmy was a first year medicine student. Jimmy had previously studied a Geology degree at another university. Jimmy had to produce a lot of different types of writing including turning scientific papers into layman speak. Jimmy enjoyed writing in the various styles that he was expected to write in. He found it a creative process, and personally rewarding and strived to do a good job. He felt that writing allowed him to develop a more professional and authoritative voice, and even experimented with style and humour. At the same time, Jimmy found that sometimes he had to restrict his writing approaches. This happened in cases where there was a specific task set, or a particular style expected. In these cases, Jimmy adhered to what was wanted but did so slightly begrudgingly. He talked about times when individual members of staff had power enough to be precise in their individual preferences. Jimmy didn't see this as a source of stress but more of an annoyance. He had learnt to negotiate the particular desires of individual members of staff by working out what they preferred and ensuring his work met those expectations. Jimmy found writing stress-free so long as he had time enough to organise himself. He found help in informal support networks and valued peer mentoring from the cohort above his.

Joss	Joss was a final year medicine student. Joss felt that writing could be stressful at times, but that ultimately, it was a positive endeavour and led to certain privileges. In particular, Joss talked about opportunities to write papers with her supervisors that would potentially lead to publications. Joss saw the real-life applicability of writing as something that was a motivating and rewarding factor in writing. Joss did say that writing could be stressful and at times she would be overcome with emotion and cry when she received her grades. She also talked about inconsistencies across staff – although suggested this was more of a set of perceived inconsistencies. She talked about some staff being better at giving feedback than others, and the marking of work being 'incredibly subjective'. She felt as if she studied within a competitive context. She thought many of her peers would say that they had a lot of support with writing, but that many others would moan and say they had no support with writing. Joss felt she was somewhere in the middle. Joss also said that some of her peers were not coping with the writing, but were unable to ask for help and had become almost 'trapped' in a situation of struggling in writing but feeling unable to ask for help in writing.
Letitia	Letitia was a recent graduate having graduated within the last 6 months. Letitia wished not to be identified at course level, but was happy to be referred to as a student from the Faculty of Health. Letitia had achieved a 2:1 degree overall, but was close to achieving a first and often strived to achieve firsts in her written work. Letitia enjoyed reading and research but sometimes found the writing quite onerous. A contributing factor to this was time management, as Letitia explained that her time was split between placement activity, research and writing – so sometimes writing assessments was a bit of a stretch. Letitia recalls writing as anxious times. The big gripe that Letitia shared with me was the perceived inconsistencies across staff in terms of marking and providing feedback. She also mentioned that some guidance was unclear or vague for particular writing tasks which had contributed to feelings of uncertainty. The issues of inconsistencies were something that Letitia's cohort raised with lecturers, and included in their evaluations. Letitia also indicated that it was widely reported within the NSS of her year. The vague levels of feedback, and the inconsistencies across 'harsh' marking tended to be the things that Letitia was mainly concerned about when she reflected on her writing experiences.
Lydia	Lydia was a third year Biochemistry and Biology student. She expressed a passion for her subjects and found, as a result of her disciplinary interests, that she enjoyed writing and found it a rewarding process. Lydia did express some concerns about her English skills. She felt that her grammar and spelling sometimes held her writing skills back, and that this was something she tended

	not to seek support with at University because she felt it was a set of skills that should be already established prior to Higher Education study. Lydia sought help from her sister and other family members in this respect. Lydia enjoyed writing for in-course assessments. These were pieces of writing that students were required to do in between and in addition to module study. She enjoyed that she had a free range choice and that she would be able to research and write something that nobody else was – thereby limiting comparisons made to her peers. Lydia talked about inconsistencies in feedback from staff. She felt that she had made a wrong decision in her dissertation choice and felt she should have chosen the supervisor over the subject. However, she also felt that harsh markers were legitimised if they provided thorough feedback. Lydia's main gripe was with her fellow students. She felt that often she was asked to provide results to her peers who she was convinced had not done the work. Lydia felt that this could lead to accusations of plagiarism and collusion. Lydia was careful who she studied with. She saw some peers sharing their anxiety, or 'sheltering' their work, or playing down their progress in writing.
Melanie	Melanie was a recent graduate (within 6 months) in Social Work. She found that in reflecting back on the writing she had been required to do as part of the course, that overall she had found it a positive and rewarding experience, and that writing had helped her to learn. She talked about there being such a thing as 'class anxiety'. This was a reference to occasions when her peers would verbalise their worries and stresses in relation to writing tasks. Melanie felt that class-anxiety occurred in lectures and in study spaces such as libraries. Melanie felt that exposure to 'class anxiety' led her to be less confident with what she was doing in her own writing approaches. She felt that the best thing to do was to try to remove herself from those sorts of situations. Melanie also remembered how particular times in writing were quite stressful. She had supported a fellow student through a difficult time in their studies as they faced three failed marks which ultimately lost her a place on the course. Melanie had found the experience stressful and it left a flavour in the way she experienced waiting for marks in her own future assignment work. Melanie also talked about inconsistencies across lecturing staff. This was in relation to marking, approachability and helpfulness. She also recounted times when lecturers were very clear about what they wanted to students to do (and this was met with anxiety in the cohort), and when lecturers were very vague (also causing unsettlement).
Norma	Norma was a Psychology 2nd year student. She had started University with ambitions to become a child psychologist although had since become sure of what she wanted to do. Norma talked about 'stressing' quite a bit when writing. She

	talked about writing as quite important on her course, with assessments very essay-based. Norma felt used to writing in different ways for different genres and felt comfortable with the variation that this offered her. Norma commented that her main concerns in relation to writing were around grammar. She said she felt mindful of grades when writing in a way that prompted self-censoring. She suggested that her own sense of 'needing' a 2:1 sometimes detracted from 'enjoying' the writing. Norma felt that there was variety in the way staff helped with writing, provided feedback and supported assignments but that ultimately, students were generally 'left to their own devices' in writing. Norma reflected that some more help or input would be welcomed.
Robbie	Robbie was a first year Law student. Robbie was slightly negative about his writing experiences although he wasn't scathing. He felt that he was still learning the ropes and that he had made some mistakes in year 1 that he intended not to repeat in year 2. He found that overall writing was a pressurised process and mainly because of the perceived need to achieve highly within the discipline of law if to go onto practice in working life after graduation. As a result, his writing approach was to stick as firmly to guidelines as possible and didn't relish the idea of being more creative, exploratory or experimental in any way in his own writing. Overall, Robbie saw this as a negative part of writing. Robbie also found that extracting information from lecturing staff had been difficult. He felt that instructions were often unclear, leading to possible difficulties in his own work. He found that accessing individual support with academic staff had been more negative than positive and felt as if he hadn't received any constructive feedback. Robbie compared this experience to his peers feedback and concluded that different staff gave different feedback in terms of quality.
Simon	Simon had spent a year as a first year student studying History and International Relations. When I spoke to Simon, he had recently transferred to a different University. Simon spoke about writing experiences and views based on what he had come across at the site of study, although he did mention some other examples, which have not featured in my analysis. Simon has a confident set of views about writing. He told me how he enjoyed writing and that he took it seriously with designs on perhaps achieving a first degree overall. Simon talked about he was willing to stretch for a first to aid his employability in the future. He felt that he was generally well supported and that feedback he had received was useful in helping him further his writing skills. Simon felt as if there was a creative aspect to writing which he enjoyed tapping into, whilst being aware of the main aim to keep to the task. Simon felt that the biggest issue with writing that he had

	experienced was the jump from what was expected at college level, to what was expected at university level.
Sookie	Sookie was a graduate (within 6 months) in Education and History. Sookie had previously attended a different university to study English and History but was unhappy in her course and moved to the site of study as a year 1-entry student. Sookie expressed how much she had loved writing prior to university and how she enjoyed writing poetry. Sookie reflected that her time at university had changed the way she felt about writing for the worst. Sookie put this change down to the volume of writing that was expected of her throughout her degree. Sookie talked about enjoying doing the research for an essay and writing in a way that conveyed her views on a particular topic. However, Sookie found that over time she gave herself less scope for saying what she wanted to say and placed more emphasis on writing what she thought was wanted to be heard. Sookie found that writing contained some pressures – especially pressures to achieve particular grades. Sookie recounted positive relationships with some members of academic staff and some negative relationships with academic members of staff. She thought that the support for writing was not promoted enough.

4.3.5 Access

Deliberate attention was paid to the interview setting in a way that was sensitive to what

Elwood and Martin (2000) refer to as the 'microgeographies' of interviews. This particular

understanding of interviews and interviewing considers the significance of the immediate

interview environment and is often an underappreciated component of the interview

context (Mann 2016). The space in which the interview takes place in, having significance to

the interviewee in some way or another, additionally contributes to the interview:

interviewee relationship. As Elwood and Martin (2000: 650) explain: 'The microgeographies

of the interview reflect the relationships of the researcher with the interview participant,

the participant with the site, and the site within the broader sociocultural context that

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affects both researcher and participant'. In other words, the co-construction of an interview is also dependent upon places and spaces.

I offered participants the choice on where the interview would take place. It was important that students felt comfortable to share their views and 'open up' to me as the interviewer during the interviews, especially as an 'outsider'. To help achieve this, (and so long as deemed 'safe'), all interviews took place at the preferred location and time of the interviewee. Consequently, my interviews took place over a range of settings including: student homes, the Students' Union, the library, a teaching room on campus and a restaurant on campus.

4.3.6 The Interviews

The further 16 students that I interviewed during the substantive stage of the research made a total of 20 interviews overall. The first interview during the substantive stage was by telephone and was with a student known to me at another university. The purpose of this interview was to pilot the interview questions. Data yielded from this particular interview has not been used in the data analysis or write up of this research but was a useful exercise in the refinement of the interview schedule.

The interviews that I conducted were a series of one-off encounters. Therefore, great care had to be taken in order to maximise the time that I had with the students who I spoke to. I used an interview script that followed a schema of initial questions, in-depth questions and follow-up questions (*see* Savin-Baden & Major 2013). The interview script that I used allowed me to develop what could be understood as a 'guided conversation' (Waller,

Farquharson and Dempsey 2016: 78) and was useful in ensuring levels of similarity in terms of coverage (Kumar 2014). I also used what Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011: 129) refer to as 'motivational probes' (mmm, yeah, ah-huh…), in order to stimulate discussion with the students I talked to.

The interviews were developed with a idiographic intention in order to develop a sense of the specific nature of different individual cases (Coe 2017). Interviews were thus designed to encourage narratives in order to foreground subjectivity and positionality (Riessman 2002) in relation to the issue of student writing. Interviews were long. Not in the sense promoted by McCracken (1988) – a four-stage process - but in the sense that conversations were detailed, considered writing issues from various and multiple angles, and lengthy. Most interviews lasted about an hour. The longest interview spanned 1 hour and 20 minutes, and therefore it can perhaps be gleaned that I had reasonable success in developing an interviewing atmosphere that enabled my participants to talk.

In noting the degree of my success in encouraging students to open up to me during the interviews, I also admit that my presence influenced the interview events. By extension, I am acknowledging that my own role can be viewed upon as that of a co-constructer in the data collection process. Roulston (2010) suggests that postmodern and constructionist approaches to interviews accept that there is no one true authentic self. Interviews tend to open up access merely to versions of selves and not *the* self. Versions are arrived at via a co-construction of data between the interviewer and the interviewee. I recognise that my role as a researcher was not a distant, objective 'other' looking in, and my being part of the research shaped the data that was generated on the day. However, the interpretative

researcher would usually take the view that 'we are not [and cannot be] disembodied observers' (Walliman 2018: 23), and therefore, our own envelopment in the research process, when dealing directly with people, is inevitable.

4.3.7 Ethical issues

My research was guided by the ethical principles for researchers in education as set out by British Educational Research Association (BERA henceforth). Prior to collecting data, my research proposal and associated documentation was reviewed and eventually approved by the University Ethical Committee for postgraduate research. All participants were supplied with information about the research before any of the interviews took place, allowing them with the time to fully and properly consider whether or not they were happy and comfortable to participate.

All of the students had sight also of the consent forms used before the interview and were asked to sign consent forms at the start of the interview. With the permission of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded on an MP3 device and later transcribed and stored on a password protected personal computer.

All student names have been replaced with pseudonyms in order to ensure that data is anonymised. I chose pseudonyms instead of numbers in order to convey the human element behind each interview. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Students were offered to review the final interview transcripts although none choose to do so.

4.3.8 Data analysis

Qualitative data is designed to deal with the ambiguities of the social world and can 'produce different lenses on social reality, lenses that make society and its phenomena understandable' (Alasuutari 2010: 147). But whilst the strength of qualitative research is often seen as in its ability to provide 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), the challenge therein for the researcher is making sense of unstructured and often discordant data. The fuzziness inherent within social research is engagingly captured through Schon's (1983) metaphoric reference to the 'swampy lowlands' and also used by Haggis (2004) to highlight the specific difficulties in relation to the often implicit nature of learning. The fuzziness of 'the swamp' was notable in the mercurial nature of the data I had in relation to the matter of student writing and seemed to lend itself to analysis using thematic networks as a way to thematise data in relational ways.

Thematic analysis is a commonly applied technique for research that takes an inductive approach (Harding 2013). The thematic network approach (*see* Attride-Stirling 2001) borrows strongly from thematic analysis (Smith and Firth 2011) but has additionality in the way that themes are ultimately organised relationally to accompanying sub-themes. Using networks as opposed to linear processes allowed me to construct thematic webs to better consider the spread and overlap of particular thematic trends.

I have provided an overview of the different stages of the data analysis in the following section. However, before the stages are presented, the circuitous nature of thematic data

analysis requires a more granular level of description in relation to the step-by-step processes taken, which I shall provide here. Using webs entailed some grappling with the data in order to obtain the best 'fit' as part and parcel of the data analysis process. As a result, the data were looked at from different angles, and codes and themes used were developed using an iterative approach. The purpose of this excursion into data analysis is therefore to close the loop between the initial coding and the development of the global themes around which this thesis is organized.

The original codes, as seen in Table.4 on page 127, were placed into a coding framework (see Appendix Q). I used a very simple table with two columns: one to denote the code and the other column was populated with fragments of text taken from interview transcripts that reflected the corresponding code. A coding framework was constructed for each of the interviews (see Appendix R). In accordance with the thematic data network analysis approach, extracts used to populate the coding frameworks can be words, sentences or longer extracts of text. At these initial stages of data analysis, I chose to include lengthier extracts of text from the interview transcripts to maintain the integrity of the context.

The next step was to develop abstract themes from the coded texts. I used another table to list the codes and penned a series of keywords that reflected the extracts taken under the initial codes (see Appendix S). Commensurate with the thematic network data analysis approach, themes are reread and developed into organising themes. As a result, themes were renamed as the data analysis progressed. The working umbrella headings were used to generate an initial set of global themes (see Appendix U). At this stage, there were four global themes: 'writing is right or wrong', 'writing is linked to futures', 'writing is a game' and 'writing is transformative'.

Upon developing global networks, the thematic network analysis approach suggests the researcher returns to the data with the global networks to 'verify and refine the network' (Attride-Stirling 2001: 393). At this point, I returned to the global networks and was not quite satisfied that they fully reflected the size and shape of the data. Returning to the interview extracts, the global themes were further refined so that 'writing is transformative' became thought of as 'writing authenticity'; and 'writing is a game' and 'writing as right and wrong' were collapsed to make 'writing controls'.

The thinking behind these changes were helped by Nvivo software. Through the course of using Nvivo, I had developed a type of shorthand using singular words to describe the global themes (i.e. empowering, purposeful, meaningless, controlled). These words seemed an appropriate way of developing the organizing themes and therefore replaced some of the old codes and keywords that had acted as 'notes to self' during the first stages of data analysis.

As part of this process, a third potential global theme was considered under the theme of 'writing relationships'. But this particular theme was later disregarded because I was concerned that it represented a small part of the data overall, and that issues to do with relationships in any case could be dealt with as part of a wider theme that I started to think about as 'writing uncertainties'.

On reviewing the themes as set out within the 'writing themes grid', a final reorientation of the themes helped me to 1) apply the data in ways to help me answer my own research questions and 2) capture the spread, range and nature of views gleaned from the student accounts. The original codes were finally organized into three types. One set reflected data that tended to refer to the more positive aspects of writing that students spoke of. Another set represented more the tensions that existed in relation to writing that students identified

or expressed in their accounts of writing. And a final set of codes centered upon the worrisome and unsettling aspects of writing that students talked about encountering as student writers. The table below shows how the codes are grouped accorded to the similarities in coded text segments (i.e. the sorts of things that students were saying). The column entitled 'synopsis of coded text segments' is shaded to highlight that these are examples of the sorts of things that students talked about in relation to the original codes. The table also shows how the original codes are nested within organising themes that are likewise housed by a global network. The table indicates how these themes are reflected in the organisation of the thesis by including the titles of the data analysis chapters:

Table. 3: An overview of the data analysis

Original Codes	Synopsis of coded text segments	Organising Themes	Global Network	Chapter
Identity Confidence Positive staff relations Positive writing experiences Sources of help	*Researching, transferable skills, emerging professional identities, creativity, research, contribution*	Enabling Empowering Purposeful Agential	Writing Freedoms	Opportunities and Possibilities in student writing
Game-playing Power Playing it safe Decoding and course-switching	*Having to write what is expected of you, There is one notional 'right' answer Feels like jumping through hoops*	Compromising Meaningless Restrictive	Writing Controls	Between a rock and a hard place
Risk Anxiety High stakes High cost Power Playing it safe Deficit Sources of help	*Negative experiences such as past failures or low marks, Inconsistencies in writing help and guidance on assignments, Inconsistencies in marking (because inconsistencies rely on luck – out of your control*	Uncontrolled Uninformed Unrehearsed Uncertain	Writing Uncertainties	The 'warm' and 'cold' risks of student writing

The next section will pay attention to the named stages of data analysis within this thematic network approach.

4.3.8.1 Stage 1 of Data Analysis: coded Text segments

The first stage in developing thematic networks is to list a set of preliminary themes. The themes identified are driven both by literature and by novel insights as data analysis begins. In addition, I penned some themes based on my own observations from practice with a view of detecting within the data, extracts that mapped across to my original thinking. When working through the data, I also added themes that appeared as salient within the texts. In total, at the end of stage 1, I was working with 13 themes.

Table. 4: Preliminary themes

Key:
White font (deriving from literature and connected to RQs)
Black font (derived from professional practice but connected to RQs)
Purple font salient in the text itself

Risk	Anxiety	Playing it safe	High cost, high stakes	Confidence
Power	Identity	Decoding/course-switching	Deficit	Game playing
	Positive staff relationships	Positive writing experiences	Sources of support	

4.3.8.2 Stage 2: Organising Themes

The second stage involved raking through the data and coding segments and text extracts according to either pre-labelled themes, or by generating new ones. I employed the use of NVivo at this particular stage of analysis. I wanted to develop a clearer view of the patterns and frequencies of the themes that I had identified in the data transcripts. The process of coding allowed me to fan out each theme conceptually, relabelling accordingly. As a result, the original codes were re-arranged into what Attride-Stirling (2001: 381) refers to as 'organising themes'; both a refined version of the original themes and a precursor to the overarching 'global themes'.

Following the arranging of themes, Attride-Stirling (2001) suggests that the researcher might consider how the codes fit together thematically through a stage of further refinement. An overview of a pre-emptive arrangement of themes with potential global themes are represented below:

Table. 5: Organising themes

Global Writing Themes:	Abstract themes from positive codes	Abstract Themes from negative codes	Types of positive coded text segments	Types of negative coded text segments
Writing Authenticity	**Writing is seen as:** Enabling, empowering, purposeful, agential	**Writing is seen as:** Compromising, controlled, meaningless, restrictive	*Researching, transferable skills, emerging professional identities, creativity, research*	*Having to write what is expected of you,* *There is one notional 'right' answer* *Feels like jumping through hoops*
Writing Efficacy	**The writer feels:** Equipped and skilled;	**The writer feels:**	*Tried and test strategies*	*Negative experiences such as past failures or low marks,*

	experienced and certain	Uncontrolled, uninformed, unrehearsed, Uncertain	*Time management skills* *Good marks received – positive experiences of writing* *Well-researched*	*Inconsistencies in writing help and guidance on assignments, Inconsistencies in marking (because inconsistencies rely on luck – out of your control)*
Writing Relationships	**Associated relationships are** Supportive, collaborative, useful **Relationships indicate that writing is an independent activity**	**Associated relationships are:** Unsupportive, competitive, distant, **Relationships indicate that writing is an isolating activity**	*Family and friends as useful proof readers* *Peers as study buddies* *Staff as helpful/study as independent*	*Lack of informal points of support, competitive relationship with peers, Staff as unhelpful or distant – feeling as if you are on your own*

4.3.8.3 Stage 3: Arranging Themes into Global Networks

The final stage of thematic data network analysis involved developing what Attride-Stirling (2001) refers to as global themes. At this stage, data is analysed not in a linear way but in a relational format. The organisation of themes in this way means that each global theme becomes a 'fountainhead' (Attride-Stirling 2001: 392) that encompasses related sub-themes (or the organising themes). The creation of global themes is a separate and distinct phase that leads to the goal of an endpoint of being able to 'integrate what has been done into a meaningful and coherent picture of the data' (Punch 2009). Or in other words, the generation of the thematic networks.

At this stage of my analysis, the overarching theme of 'writer authenticity' became splintered into two separate global themes: writing freedoms and writing controls (in order

to fully explore the contrast between the negative and positive codes in relation to writing authenticity). It was important to make the distinction in order to help crystalise the different and competing ways that individual students, at once, talked about writing. The separating out into freedoms and controls also helped me to align the data analysis with my research questions around reconciling the competing factors relating to writing in a consumer-led Higher Education system.

Conversely, the preliminary global theme of writing relationships seemed to add an unhelpful over-emphasis on the frequency with which students tended to talk about their writing relationships with other people. However, whilst talk of writing relationships was not a prolific topic within the interviews, the times that it did arise within the interviews suggested that this was of some significance to the students and therefore part of their overall accounts of their writing experiences and views. Thus, the writing relationship global theme was collapsed into the global theme of Writing Efficacy, and seen as part of a wider bundle of topics that students talked about in ways that indicated whether they felt confident and competent in writing, or unsure and unrehearsed in writing.

The final set of global themes, or 'fountainheads' are displayed below. In the chapter organisation of this thesis, I have discussed the 'Writing Freedoms' in chapter 5 called 'The possibilities and opportunities in student writing'. Chapter 6 is called 'the rock and a hard place' and refers to the global theme of 'Writing Controls'. The global theme of 'Writing Uncertainties' feeds into the final chapter that I have called 'The 'warm' and 'cold' risks of student writing'.

Table. 6: Global Network I

Global Network	Organising themes	Types of coded text segments
Writing Freedoms	Enabling Empowering Purposeful Agential	*Researching, transferable skills, emerging professional identities, creativity, research*

Table. 7: Global Network II

Global Network	Organising themes	Types of coded text segments
Writing Controls	Compromising, meaningless, restrictive	*Having to write what is expected of you,* *There is one notional 'right' answer* *Feels like jumping through hoops*

Table. 8: Global Network III

Global Network	Organising themes	Types of coded text segments
Writing Uncertainties	Uncontrolled, uninformed, unrehearsed, Uncertain	*Negative experiences such as past failures or low marks,* *Inconsistencies in writing help and guidance on assignments,* *Inconsistencies in marking (because inconsistencies rely on luck – out of your control)*

4.4 Summary of chapter

This chapter has provided an account of the research process and the ways in which methodology has informed the research design. I have acknowledged the ways in Academic Literacies research has established traditions, and how my own research echoes some of these ways of thinking, but also how my own research differs. As such, I have paid attention to the issues of using semi-structured interviews as a way to develop an understanding of student writing. I have suggested that being alert to metaphors and metaphorical speech, as opposed to other more well-known elicitation devices, was a useful way to develop an appreciation of the student views that were shared with me during the interviews. I have also provided an overview of the processes of data analysis, and how, my approach to analysis was influenced by a thematic network approach.

I have, finally, provided an outline of the global networks that will next constitute the following three chapters. Chapter 5 will deal with 'Opportunities and possibilities in student writing', chapter 6 will discuss 'The rock and a hard place' , and chapter 7 will be my final data analysis chapter covering 'The 'cold' and 'warm' risks of student writing'.

Chapter 5: Opportunities and Possibilities in student writing

5.1 Introduction

I start the discussion *outside* of the rock and the hard place. It seems important, if to convey a sense of scale, to firstly establish the views and accounts that did not equate to what might be thought of as being stuck in an impossible situation. Thus, my focus begins with the instances when students saw possibilities and opportunities in writing for voice in student writing. I discuss the implications for Academic Literacies in a number of ways. Firstly, I explore how student writers talked about writing in ways that connected them to audiences beyond the 'institutional relationships of power and authority' (Lea and Street 1998: 157). Secondly, I draw from the notion of what Thesen refers to as 'centrifugal forces' (2014: 6) to explore the ways that student writers resist 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6) by finding ways to deposit aspects of themselves – such as humour, style or creativity – into their writing. Finally, I discuss how academic literacies research tends to overlook the personal rewards of writing, despite a mandate to: 'throw light on failure or non-completion, as well as success and progression' (Lea and Street 1998: 158). I consider how these aspects of student writing, that are less frequently debated, hold important clues about the ways that students writers resist the consumer logic and employability narratives in today's HE climate. Collectively, the chapter explores the ways in which the students I talked to saw writing as something that involved more than achieving grades, and as something that allowed them a sense of their own voice.

5.2 Other audiences and other spaces in writing

The world beyond academia appears so far to have been less focused on in academic literacies research (Tydesley 2013). But three students – Erin, Joss and Jimmy - talked about writing in ways that encompassed other types of audiences. These audiences were people who did not mark student work and sometimes were outside of the academy. Erin talked about vulnerable people in relation to her writing for her Social Work degree. Joss talked about the wider academic community in relation to her writing for Medicine. And Jimmy talked about his writing in Medicine with the general public and potential patients in mind. The connections that these students made between their writing within the academy and other types of audiences raises questions about how else power is played out via relationships related to student writing. It is explored here that the debates about the applicability of communities of practice for Academic Literacies theory have so far yet to consider the range and reach of relationships beyond the ivory towers of academia.

As previously discussed, the place of communities of practice as a way of understanding student writing has attracted some scrutiny. For some, students can be seen as budding writers and, therefore, the Communities of Practice model is seen as rightfully applied (Tapp 2015). But others disagree and have stressed how students cannot be thought of as apprentices of the academy if not everyone is working towards becoming part of it – which they are not (Ashwin 2009), and that the relationship between student and staff is, in any case, ostensibly hierarchical (Green 2016).

These types of debates subsume the assumption implicit in the Academic Literacies framework that student writing should be understood by its subordination to the institution. An alternative conceptualisation of literacy practices taking place in certain contexts may be found in Gee (2004) who suggests that 'spaces', unlike, 'communities' locates the focus on interactions rather than membership. The term 'spaces' captures a plurality that reflects a small number of students I talked to about their other relationships that they saw as at stake in writing – and in ways that implicated positions of power in different ways. For example, becoming a professional and dealing with the public or working with disadvantaged groups and becoming an advocate for vulnerable people. In these instances, writing was something that had an importance outside of academia to other 'spaces' in ways that students saw their own power – often in terms of a duty or a responsibility to do right by others.

Erin was a final year student studying Social Work. In many ways, Erin felt that writing was something that was heavily regulated by the academy and always carried risks. Erin had failed her second year and managed to appeal against being withdrawn from the course. These experiences led her to always worry about her writing and the possibility of failing. Despite these difficulties with writing, Erin saw how some types of writing had the potential to do good or to influence people outside of the academic community. She talked about her dissertation work as providing opportunities to represent a vulnerable group in ways that might make a difference in relation to the lives of others. Erin said:

I: Okay, and what would you say are the most satisfying aspects of academic writing, if anything?

Erin: Umm....I suppose it was like with my dissertation. I felt like I was making a contribution for people with dementia, trying to fight their corner. I like it when I can...probably, maybe, advocate for somebody in my writing or show anti-discriminatory work and that. I suppose in our work we are...our passion for the career comes through so I think that is the good part of our course. Obviously the passion is already there because you have to prove yourself to get on the course so that should....I think that does show in your writing. I have had that said to me, like I can see when you are enjoying writing something to when you are not because I am flowing more.

Doing a dissertation connected Erin to other groups of people. Erin reported becoming responsible for the care of others. She felt she must "fight their corner" and through writing "show anti-discriminatory work". Writing was talked about as a way to "advocate for somebody" and to make "a contribution". Above all else, the best aspects of writing for Erin appeared to be when they connected to people beyond the academic community.

Academic Literacies talks about writing as a social practice expressed in terms of what the institution, discipline or individual staff member expect to see – and not what the individual student brings to the table. Within this view of writing, power is implicated as something belonging to the academy and entrenched in academic traditions and disciplinary ways of knowing. The student writer is in the position of having to learn the ropes of how writing is done *their* way. But when Erin talked about writing her dissertation, she appeared to reflect on the ways her own power, in relation to vulnerable others, was invested in writing. With this particular incentive behind Erin's writing, writing is able to 'flow' and 'passion' for Social Work is unleashed.

Erin's account provides a useful lens to think about the extent to which academic literacies theory aligns with communities of practice models. Erin did not talk about writing in apprenticeship terms. Erin did not indicate a yearning to become or belong to the academy. If anything, Erin seemed to see herself as an outsider to the academy. She talked about having to abide by writing rules that she did not always understand in order to avoid failing and getting withdrawn from her course. Erin identified how "making a contribution" allowed her to find writing more worthwhile. As Erin put it, "our passion for the career comes through so I think that is the good part of our course". Erin identified other 'spaces' (Gee 2006) that mattered to her. The world of 'Social Work', and the good that this profession was seen to be able to do was something that provided Erin with other ways to think about how power was connected to her own student writing.

In another instance, Joss recognised the potential to write something that might be of interest and of use to other professionals in the field, and thus, more far-reaching than the degree that she was studying. Joss was a final year medicine student. Joss was a confident student and like many other medicine students who have to achieve high UCAS tariffs in the first place, she had a history of achieving highly academically. Joss recognised ways that writing opened up opportunities and although she could see some restrictive aspects to writing, on the whole she saw writing as a purposeful pursuit. Joss talked about the ways in which her writing could make a contribution and therefore, make a difference. Joss mentioned how writing carried with it the possibility of publication, and therefore writing was something that extended beyond an assessment or part of a qualification:

I: Okay. What would you say are the most satisfying aspects of writing?

Joss: Let me think. I guess if you get really excited about a project you have done or a piece of work you have

conducted, then being able to put that in a way that becomes acceptable to your field of speciality or area then

that is very rewarding. I guess it is very rewarding to see it in print. I probably don't appreciate as much as to

how privileged we are, if you do do it properly it will be printed and it will be out in the wider community

compared to other essays you write at school and no one ever reads again; only to get a mark!

Joss appeared to talk about writing in ways that were consistent to a communities of

practice model. Joss referred to contributing to a "field of speciality". She expressed a desire

to become "accepted" by "being able to put that in a way that becomes acceptable". In

contrast to Erin, Joss expressed writing in apprentice terms that resembled more the way

that Tapp (2015) applies communities of practice theory to academic literacies research.

Unlike Erin, Joss seemed to automatically connect the field of medicine with the academic

study of medicine. For Erin, writing was a way to vouch for vulnerable people in a society

that ignores or does not see their plights. For Joss, writing is a way of embedding herself in a

discipline and a profession all at once. In other words, Erin separates out the academic

community from Social Work, whereas Joss combines the academic and medicine

community into one.

Joss's account of writing tells us something else about the way students understand their

own Academic Literacies. Whereas student writers are generally seen in terms of being at

the mercy of the much more powerful academic audience (Ivanic 1998), Joss talked about

the audience in less hierarchical and power-imbued ways. Joss spoke of writing as

something that could end up "out in the wider community" and how that possibility was a

"privilege". Joss's comments implied she could see how writing offered her a type of power that might not be available to most people. Her writing was understood by Joss as something that could end up in the public domain and therefore could become influential.

In both cases, Joss and Erin talked about their writing as something that had the potential to reach beyond the academy and to connect to real life people and real life instances. Writing was something that they expressed as including power relations that stretched beyond the course teams involved in the marking of student work. Therefore, Joss and Erin were able to account for times when they saw themselves as writers connected to other audiences via their writing. For example, either as part of a responsibility to speak for others (in the case of Erin), or as part of making a contribution to knowledge in the wider field relating to a particular discipline (in the case of Joss).

Jimmy also talked about writing with other types of audiences in mind. Jimmy was a first year Medicine student. Similarly to Joss, he was a high-achiever and was confident academically. Jimmy was a mature student. He had previously taken a Geology degree and had returned to Higher Education to study Medicine. Jimmy therefore was in a unique position that allowed him to reflect on two sets of experiences in relation to writing. Overall, Jimmy had a mix of views about writing. He saw ways and techniques of making writing his own and saw how writing offered him possibilities to make a difference to others. At the same time, Jimmy saw how writing was restricted and sometimes writing was about producing what other people wanted to see.

In the interview, Jimmy sometimes thought about writing as connected to his future life as a GP. On one occasion, Jimmy imagined how he might need to produce a campaign leaflet in a bid to raise awareness amongst the public and within his practice. Jimmy also talked about the need to write letters to patients and how that would entail articulating complex and specialized information in a way that would need to be understandable to a non-specialist audience. Jimmy saw writing in his university studies as in some way contributing to these types of demands in his future life:

I: How much variation in the type of writing that you have to do, how much variation is there in the type of writing you have to do on your course?

Jimmy: There's a lot of variation, in addition to the type of writing I do in my self-study we have to do scientific papers and abstracts and then we also have to do… we call them layman summaries, so taking a scientific paper and then summarising it for the lay person to understand; so all forms really.

I: Yeah, and is that variation something that you like?

Jimmy: Yes it is, I think it's quite important for the career path it will lead to.

I: Why is that important in the career path that you're thinking of?

Jimmy: Well as a doctor the information you record about a patient has to be vitally understandable and it has to be no room for error if the correct treatment of that patient is to be applied. Also you'll be spending a lot of your time explaining courses of action or treatment plans or even how to take medicine to your patients and it's important that your patients have to understand exactly what they're supposed to be doing and often that will involve writing letters.

And later on in the discussion, Jimmy revealed:

I: Relevant to the world of work?

Jimmy: Yeah, it might be something you'd do if you were a GP and you had a practice and loads of your patients, I don't know, smoked or something, you might want to make an information leaflet and know how to go about doing it properly so it doesn't look really stupid when you're getting appraised by another doctor and they come along and think, "Who's made this, this is rubbish!" "That was me." So yeah, I think it would be definitely a good thing, not just on my particular course but on other courses it would be really important for the future to learn how to write in other ways.

Within the Academic Literacies model, it is proposed that learning to write academically requires an appreciation of the disciplinary ways of knowing that are privileged by the 'statusful community' (Ivanic 1998: 83). So far, academic literacies tends to refer to writing rules as being almost entirely academy-led. However, in Jimmy's case, he reflects on his academic literacies in more diverse ways. Jimmy considered how to say things and knowing what can be said in relation to an academic audience, a professional audience and an imagined patient audience. The writing tasks set by Jimmy's course appear to understand these multiple 'spaces' (Gee 2004) that students of medicine need to be able to address. Therefore, writing involves several 'spaces' (Gee 2004) at once. For Jimmy, the plural nature of academic literacies is not limited to thinking in multi-disciplinary ways, or even in relation to different individual expectations, but instead to wider audiences beyond the confines of the academic world.

While an academic community might dictate what good writing is, Jimmy also writes for other audiences, in ways that diversify the relationship Jimmy has between writing and power. A public audience suggests a new type of power for Jimmy when he becomes responsible for being able to explain medical terms in a lay context. So for Jimmy, writing is not only about getting to grips with what the 'statusful community' (Ivanic 1998: 83) expect to see, it is also about developing writing that has currency, validity and reach in other types of spaces. Jimmy's academic literacies contain a number of audiences in ways that reveal how student writing might also be seen as type of responsibility.

The accounts of Erin, Joss and Jimmy include 'spaces' (Gee 2004) beyond academia. The way they think about their writing includes other people beyond those likely to mark and grade their work. Their accounts suggest that student writing is not limited by the obvious audiences generally associated with writing as subsumed in Academic Literacies traditions. Perhaps even more telling is how this is the case for different student profiles. While Joss and Jimmy were very similar, Erin's experiences of writing played out quite differently. Jimmy and Joss were strong confident writers with a history of success behind them in ways that may have helped to sustain future successes (Smith and Deane 2014; Pajeres *et al* 2001). Erin on the other hand, lacked confidence and self-efficacy having failed several year two assignments. Erin talked about writing in terms that chimed with the ways Fernsten and Reda (2011) compared writing to maths-phobia. But nevertheless, Erin imagined her own position as one of power and responsibility to others.

5.3 Using the 'stuff' in writing to convey a sense of 'voice'

Voice, as agency emerging through writing, is reflected in the way students actively seek out their own audiences. But a sense of 'voice' was also talked about by students more readily and much more frequently in relation to the way their writing reflected aspects of themselves. Students referred to having more agency when writing a dissertation with more possibilities to direct their own thinking and instigate a sense of ownership over writing. Student writers talked about the ways that they found they could deposit aspects of themselves – such as humour, style or creativity – into writing. There were also instances when students could identify times when they had augmented wording, style and articulation in a way that reflected their own sense of self. The accounts highlight the ways in which student writers would draw from 'the stuff available to them' (Lillis 2014: 238) in order to achieve voice. The small acts of agency, understood via Thesen and Cooper's (2014) notion of voice, is used to explore how student writers talked about the 'centrifugal forces' (2014: 6) that they employed in order to resist the 'pulls towards convention' (2014:6).

Thesen talks of voice in a Bakhtinian sense. Voice is viewed as enacted agency but the scope for agency is never free and always restricted by established ways of saying. Thesen applies this notion of voice to help articulate the tilting point in academic writing. In brief, the tilting point is the struggle that happens in writing between saying something original on the one hand, and satisfying certain gatekeepers on the other. The two push and pull forces involved in writing are further articulated by Thesen as the difference between centrifugal and centripetal forces. Centrifugal forces refer to what the writer wants to write, and centripetal indicates 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6) - what the writer thinks would be

prudent to write. I draw from nine of the students I interviewed to explore the ways in which students spoke about how their writing was steered by what could be viewed upon as more centrifugal forces.

Amelia was a first year Law student. Amelia took time away from education to work before starting university, and although qualifying as a mature student in technical terms, she was not much older than what might be understood as a 'traditional' student. At the same time, as a mature student, Amelia brought with her some life experiences gained from outside of education. Amelia's experiences outside of the academy, she suggested, had helped her to be self-assured in her style of writing. At the same time, Amelia mentioned how she was conscious about the fact that she had taken some time out of education to work and therefore her writing may be slightly "out of practice". However, Amelia remained defiant in what she felt she brought to the table in her own writing. As Amelia explained to me, the discipline of Law expects complex use of language from its students. She continued to explain to me how she preferred to write in more simplistic ways in order to ensure her writing was "accessible":

Amelia: Probably when I first started in September. I realised because I hadn't written for so long, I needed to properly put in some time into developing my writing style. It came back to me quite quickly but I do write in...I try and avoid any...umm...unnecessary words so it comes across as quite simplistic but actually it is quite deliberate. I think in Law essays they want you to, they like you to have lots of, you know, complicated terms in there but I don't enjoy that because I don't think it is very accessible.

Amelia talked about her experiences of writing in ways that referred to both the centrifugal and centripetal aspects of writing that she must weigh up. On the one hand, Amelia

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identified certain 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6). Amelia knew that Law liked complicated terms. However, Amelia talked too of how she wanted to write. She suggested that her style was "simplistic" as a result of trying to "avoid" unnecessary words. Amelia summed up her writing in a way that suggested that she was aware of the centrifugal forces in her own writing voice and the centripetal forces within the academy. Amelia was aware that she had a style that was different to what was expected, and by extension rewarded, in the discipline of Law. Amelia suggested in the interview that her "simplistic" style was very much "deliberate". So she was quite clear that how she writes, while deemed as unwanted by Law, was very much intentional.

In the extract, Amelia laid out what she perceived Law essays to "want". In this sentence, Amelia appears to suggest that within Law there is a preference in relation to writing style, since "want" is a desire not a stipulation. Amelia's use of the word "want" therefore denotes a sense of what they, the 'gatekeepers' of writing, would like to see. But Amelia sees 'choice'. Amelia decides to write in plainer ways so that her meaning is "accessible". In this instance, Amelia used 'the stuff that is available to her' through the level of complexity with which she chooses to express herself. Amelia felt scope to write in ways that drew from more centrifugal forces and so she was able to push away from convention. Amelia, therefore, seemed to perceive herself in the interview as a writer with a certain amount of autonomy and with her own set of priorities that informed her sense of voice in her own writing. Amelia saw opportunities to enact writing agency via the use of 'stuff ' that was 'available' to her.

In a similar example, returning to Jimmy, the first year medicine student, he talked about feeling quite "authoritative" in his writing. He viewed his writing as something that allowed him to have "the final say". His viewpoint can be understood to denote a feeling of agency that isn't often identified in other research relating to student writing. Jimmy spoke about writing with "authority" in the following way:

I: Is writing the sort of thing that you would say you enjoyed?

Jimmy: Yes it is, yeah.

I: Okay, and what emotions would you associate with writing?

Jimmy: Emotions? …Sorry….

I: It's alright, just take your time.

Jimmy: I think because it's something which is recorded in concrete as it were, it's your opinion… your opinion is being expressed in a very concrete manner and that's what people are going to read. So I sometimes feel quite authoritative when I'm writing a piece because that's the final say, that's what they're going to read, my perception on the topic

Part of writing is said to be 'putting learning on display' (Hounsell 1997: 106). For many students, the display of writing can equal a type of vulnerability or strain (Hale and Harding 2000). Jimmy's view suggests an alternative way of looking at writing that is put on display. For him, writing as a material form of expression, was something that he could garner confidence from. Jimmy appeared to relish in the way that writing offered possibilities for a

more "authoritative" tone. He suggested that he felt empowered by the thought of others reading what he has to say. In a way, Jimmy's account concurred with the way Murray and Moore (2006) talked about as the satisfying aspects of contributing to the field. However, Jimmy qualified this sentiment with "sometimes" suggesting that feeling "authoritative" in writing was not a consistent feature of how he experienced writing. And yet at times, being able to feel "authoritative" on a subject was one of the successes of Jimmy's academic literacies. Jimmy's account can be thought about in terms of using the 'stuff available' to him– style and register – in order to create an authoritative 'voice'. Jimmy seemed to view writing as an exercise in which he could develop mastery over a topic that would subsequently be shared with others.

The scope to be authoritative was something that Marley brought up in relation to a Criminology essay. Marley was one of my earlier pilot study interviewees. She was a 2nd year Criminology and Psychology student. Marley appeared academically confident in ways that suggested robust levels of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997). She felt she had a good rapport with academic lecturers that enabled her to access help with writing when needed. Marley felt particularly strong over one incident concerning an essay about South Africa. Marley felt that because she was from South Africa, that she had some say over issues to do with South Africa. Marley suggested that she felt frustrated when the essay feedback suggested to her that personal experience was not enough to substantiate certain claims that she had made. Marley reported:

Marley: I think that bias for that assessment was coming from the fact that I was writing about a South African community, so there I did think I had an authority because it was a, it's coming from a country where I've lived

in for 18 years and I do have experience. Whereas someone from the UK, even someone who is writing

academically, unless you've been out there and lived it and experienced it yourself, erm I don't think you have

an authority. So there, maybe, that is, that kind of links to what I was saying about people who have written

for ages in that field; they know it and they've lived it, erm so they would have a bias. And then my bias is

coming from I feel the same about that particular topic that I was writing about.

Marley appeared to tussle with whether or not she was right to argue for her own opinion in her writing. On the one hand, she argued for her own bias. She saw herself as "being quite opinionated" and while seeing this as a weakness in her writing, also saw it as a part of her writing style. Marley reported how she was often unprepared to take on feedback automatically on the basis of being "quite set in my own way of writing". She said:

I: Ok. and what would you say your weaknesses were?

Marley: Weaknesses, definitely not taking the feedback on board as much and then adjusting my style so that I
can do even better next time. I'm quite set in my own way of writing what I think I should answer, so not taking
input from other people. Erm and also being quite opinionated.

While Marley's confidence in herself suggested that writing was not a test of belonging (Shields 2015), her responses suggested she was not readily prepared to be 'feedback literate' (Pitt and Norton 2017: 513). Marley's clear sense of herself as a writer showed an unwillingness to bend to the demands of the 'centripetal forces' (Thesen 2014: 6) in writing in more unusual ways. Marley felt certain and equipped as a writer and defended her way of writing as a 'representation of self' (Hyland 2002: 109). She appeared to perceive her unwillingness to take on feedback as something that was akin to being true to herself. The

uncompromising position that Marley reported shows a resistance to losing voice in writing as is elsewhere reported (see Cooper 2014; McMillan 2000). She therefore provides a useful example to counter some of the suggestions that student writers have dwindled voices in the academy.

Veronica was another student who I interviewed during the pilot phase of my research. Veronica was a final year student studying Law and Politics. She also enjoyed writing and expressed how she had also enjoyed being able to reflect on writing during the interview. Veronica talked about her occasional unwillingness to abide by certain writing rules. She talked of how she knew and understood the writing rules that existed, and she explained to me the epistemological differences between the two subjects she studied in a way that denoted an ability to 'course switch' (Lea and Street 1998). But because Veronica enjoyed reading and researching when she prepared to write, she was sometimes guilty of knowingly using materials not relevant for the writing task. Veronica's articulation suggested that she understood her actions would be frowned upon by the academy and would likely cost her marks. She said:

I: Okay. And … and what would you say your weaknesses were then?

Veronica: Erm, applying it sometimes. So sometimes I'll read lots of different articles and journals and think there are some really great ideas here, and then I struggle to apply it to the question. So I've done that a couple of times where I've gone and I've gone off on a tangent with my reading because I've got myself involved and found another link or another article and then, it'll turn out that I'm off on a tangent. But I'll put it because I think it's really interesting.

According to Veronica, her academic curiosity sometimes hampered her ability to be disciplined in writing. As a result, Veronica saw that she was likely to write in irrelevant ways when swayed by literature that simply took her interest. Veronica's inclination to write in this way tells us something about her priorities when she writes. Her actions could be deemed as lacking academic skill when she allows her focus to broaden. However, Veronica talked about this as deliberate and was certain about the impact her actions had on her marks. Veronica talked about writing in ways that were swayed by the feel-good factors of writing purported by Cain and Pople (2011). Therefore, Veronica was not necessarily lacking skill but consciously resisting the centripetal pull by allowing her academic interests, and 'heightened intensity' (Elbow 2000: 127) to dictate partly the content of her writing.

The balancing act between centripetal and centrifugal forces was something that other students seemed to be able to handle in more strategic ways. Simon, Sookie and Jimmy talked about writing as an outlet for creativity. On these occasions, the students indicated the centripetal forces that they should abide by, but also the centrifugal forces that they had at their disposal as student writers. In these cases, Simon, Sookie and Jimmy can be seen as referring to and identifying 'the stuff available to them' in writing in order to enact a sense of 'voice' in their writing.

Simon was a first year student of History and International Relations. Simon was a high-achieving student and was confident about writing. Simon seemed to divide what he saw as the restraining aspects of writing (the rules of writing and the set expectations associated with writing for assessment) and the agential aspects of writing (the stuff available to you – types of knowledge and the creative use of language). Simon identified both where he could

enact agency and in the places where it would be limiting to do so. Simon spoke about keeping to the brief. He pointed out what can be seen as the more centripetal aspects of writing relating to what you "can" and "can't" do in an essay. Here, Simon can be seen to have acknowledged the rules of writing understood as the 'pulls to the centre' – the things that must be done. But Simon goes on to suggest that there are ways to transcend the rules and to write in more creative ways. In other words, Simon starts to identify 'the centrifugal forces' or 'the stuff' that is available to him as a student writer in order to enact agency. Simon talked about the "fun" that surrounds the research that gets done "around" a topic. He expanded on this by mentioning how you can "do different things" with "quirky" knowledge.

I: Okay, and what do you find the most satisfying aspects of academic writing?

Simon: Well, exploring the topic. Again, it does come down to your restraints, what you are allowed to....what you can put into your essay, what you can't put into your essay, but providing you have got a topic you enjoy it can be really, really fun just to look around it and do different things with an interesting, quirky bit of knowledge

Simon, in his explanation, appeared to embrace what Thesen refers to as 'the tilting point'. He identified that there are 'tilts' that decide what can and can't be said. He appeared to see the tilting point as something that you need to get to know: what is allowed and what is not. From this, Simon discerned that the rest is up to play. The moment that Simon says "do different things with", reflects the way in which Lillis (2014) refers to the moments of enacting agency in writing through the application of the 'stuff' available to writers. He appeared to perceive in writing opportunities the potential to have "fun" and even to

experiment with 'quirky' information. The word "quirky" is an interesting choice of words in this context. In feeling enabled to seek out and draw from "quirky" knowledge there is a potential feeling that writing is not without scope to do things differently. In other words, Simon sees writing as something that includes having an ability to do 'stuff' with. Whilst adhering to some writing rules, Simon identifies the 'stuff' within his writing experiences that are more up for grabs – seeking out unusual bits of knowledge and having "fun" with it. The way Simon talked about writing adhered neatly to Thesen's call for more 'spontaneity, flow and play' (2013: 116) in writing, Simon therefore seemed to identify the centripetal forces that were vital in writing and the centrifugal forces at his disposal for writing. Whilst aligning to the centripetal forces of writing, Simon also had fun through centrifugal forces. Writing, as a result, was conceived of as 'satisfying'.

Simon continued his thinking about the creative possibilities within his own writing. Simon pondered over how the use of language offered certain scope to be creative in ways to achieve 'personal and intimate uses of written language' (Durst 2015: 390). In the next extract, Simon identified language as something that was available to him as a student writer that enabled him to enact agency in the form of voice:

I: Okay, so do you find writing a creative process?

Simon: Umm...yes, definitely I would say....umm....yes, it does help to be creative but I do think...that comes down to it more....umm....that is a bit more to do with language...umm... because you, yes....it is sort of difficult to say really, I personally feel that creativity comes from language and how you have written it. Whereas the information you put into an essay is a lot more structured.

Simon differentiated how the use of language in writing (i.e. words, sentences, expression) offered him more centrifugal ways of writing. For Simon, it was in language, or expressive language (Britton *et al* 1975), through the choice of words that offered him ways to feel more agential in writing. Simon talked about content as being more centripetal, or in his words: "structured".

A similar view was taken by Sookie. Sookie was a recent graduate in Education and History. Sookie told me of how she had enjoyed creative writing as a pastime before university, but how her experiences of academic writing had led her to dislike writing. She felt she had to write too much and in ways that were overly dictatorial. Despite her negative view of writing during much of the interview, she did speak of how she enjoyed researching in preparation for writing and how writing could offer ways to be "slightly poetic". Sookie's view appeared to be that no matter what position you take in your essay, the way you go about setting it out in writing would always differ from one person to the next. For Sookie, writing necessitated agency. As she explained:

I: Did you find writing a creative process?

Sookie: Umm....yes, in the beginning I think it was nice because it is your own thoughts and feelings and your own.....how you interpret something, although everyone is going to have the same.....similar answers, everyone is going to have a slightly different view point and I think to convey that through words can be slightly poetic, can be really nice. But I think the volume of it can become rather overwhelming but...

Both Sookie and Simon suggested that within writing there are rules to be learnt but beyond that, there are also certain writing freedoms that seemed similar to Thesen's notion of 'flow

and play' (2013: 116). What is unsaid but implicated in these types of views is that in order to be able to enjoy the 'personal and intimate uses' (Durst 2015: 390) of writing, it is first necessary to understand and deploy writing rules. It is not so straightforward to bend the rules if you are not first familiar with them. According to Sookie and Simon, words and expression were more likely to offer centrifugal opportunities compared to content which was more likely to be shaped by centripetal forces. In other words, despite studying disciplines that hinge upon debate, Simon and Sookie agreed that what can be said in terms of content is bound by 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6).

Being able to play around with the rules of writing came up also in my conversation with Jimmy. Jimmy thought about how he saw there was a skill in being able to write complicated information in plain-speak. He said, "if you can explain, particularly from a layman's stance…something which is quite complicated". In his account, Jimmy appeared to see writing as a positive challenge. The ability to talk straightforwardly about something that is inherently complex was talked about as an achievement in and of itself. Jimmy continued to say that certain boundaries linked to writing can be pushed, by drawing on your own analogies and even using humour as a literary device. In his own words, he suggested the following:

I: What would you say are the most satisfying aspects of writing?

Jimmy: Getting your point across clearly and in an interesting manner is very satisfying. If you can explain, particularly from a layman's…if you can explain something which is quite complicated and use some interesting analogies that people are going to be able to relate to that's very satisfying and if you can slip in some dry humour as well, I think that's quite good as well, I enjoy that bit.

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In this view, Jimmy appeared to recognize his own scope for agency as a student writer by identifying specific devices, or 'the stuff available' to him. Jimmy noted that such 'stuff' can be found in register, tone, level of complexity and humour. The sense of agency through the 'stuff' that Jimmy saw as being available to him were talked about as providing what Cain and Pople (2011) suggest as the feel-good factors of writing. However, as with Simon and Sookie, these outlets may be difficult to identify unless other ground rules of writing are secure. The implication of having to know writing rules before being able to enjoy literary devices that might help enact agency in writing suggests that such scope may not be within reach for all student writers.

While Simon, Sookie and Jimmy saw opportunities for agency within certain set rules for writing, Gayle and Brenda imagined other ways when writing could be governed by more centrifugal forces. Gayle saw this as something that would come about only when completing her dissertation or in relation to possible future postgraduate study. Brenda, saw these types of opportunities as something that was nested within the reflective writing that she undertook for her Adult Nursing degree. Gayle and Brenda offered additional ways to think about how student writers might see their writing as shaped by more centrifugal forces.

Gayle was a second year student studying Physics and Business Management. Gayle had confidence in her writing and felt she understood rules that were talked about and made explicit but also rules that were 'hidden' and had to be uncloaked. Gayle talked about having very limited scope for 'centrifugal forces'. Gayle's view of writing appeared full of

restrictions and restraints. However, Gayle did not see these restrictions as negative. In her

interview, Gayle was very clear that the writing rules existed and were there to be abided.

That said, Gayle also admitted that having more opportunities to write in centrifugal ways

was something that would be a welcomed change, and she envisioned that this might be

something that she would be able to enjoy when completing her dissertation in year three.

Gayle supposed:

Gayle: You need to cover the things you've studied or you need to cover the theory part and you need to

mention people that were mentioned in the lectures. You can't just go talking about the quality management

there and the way that they did it, you need to apply to the lecture slides.

I: Does that feel restrictive at all?

Gayle: Not restrictive. I don't feel like I get much freedom in undergraduate as much as I would be in

postgraduate I'd imagine. Also with dissertation I have an idea what I want to write my dissertation on. I

wanna see how that works and I haven't spoken to anyone yet about it because my personal tutor is in physics

so I don't have anyone pretty much in the business side - but dissertation is supposed be something you write

freely and I would really much like to write something completely what I want to write not what was said to

me.

Gayle expressed an acceptance and broad agreement of writing rules that are constraining

and centripetal in nature and yet, at once, a desire to write more centrifugally. Gayle

suggested there was a stark difference between writing a conventional essay that relies on

writing, "what was said to me" and writing a dissertation that was "something you write

freely". Gayle presupposed a more centrifugal version of writing for dissertations. To put it

differently, she appeared to suggest that essays were tutor led and dissertations were

student-led. Gayle's example shows that agency in writing may not be seen as particularly forthcoming in the academy, and that it might be something that is spared only for finalist work relating to dissertation type assessment methods. Gayle's example shows that whilst for some students (Jimmy, Simon, Sookie), 'stuff' is seen as always available to them to enact agency, for other students, such agency is saved for special occasions.

Brenda was a first year student studying Adult Nursing. Brenda had a straightforward relationship with writing and found that by being organized, she could unpack the rules and get on with writing without too much fuss. Brenda seemed to suggest that her writing pursuits within 'reflections' provided a sense of agency in writing. She referred to being able to write about "how you have developed" both "as a person and a student". Brenda saw this type of writing as "creative". For Brenda, reflective writing provided her with a context to write in more agential ways. Being able to write about "feelings" meant that writing contained a part of herself in emancipating ways commensurate with how Moon (2006) and Crème (2000) understand reflective writing. In this particular case, it is the genre of reflective writing that Brenda identifies as being the 'stuff' that is 'available' to her in order to enact agency. She said:

I: Okay, and do you find writing a creative process?

Brenda: I think it depends on what you are writing about really. Like, with my reflections, that would be creative because it is personal to you and you can put in how you are feeling at the time and how you have developed since that as a person and a student. But, yes it is creative in some aspects depending on what the subject is, what you are writing about, if that makes sense.

The positive skew on reflective writing sits apart from the more critical perspectives on using this particular genre of writing with student writers (Marsh 2014; Rai 2011; Tomkins and Nicholds 2017). Reflective writing, whilst contentious, contains possibilities for students to feel potentially more agential. Brenda talked about how she found reflections personal and creative in ways that allowed her to track her personal and professional development. Brenda understood the inward-looking nature of reflective writing as something that allowed her to have more scope to write in ways that 'pushes away from the centre' (Thesen 2014: 6) compared to traditional essays.

5.4 Writing gains and successes in students' Academic Literacies

The academic literacies framework was devised in order to: 'throw light on failure or non-completion, as well as success and progression' (Lea and Street 1998: 158). However, the model tends to be used almost uniformly to unpack what goes wrong and why in student writing. While important, the emphasis on problems leaves behind the other component part in academic literacies thinking. This next section explores what is seen to go right in writing as put forward by the students I spoke to. Across the interviews, seven students talked about writing as a part of their academic literacies for learning more deeply the discipline they were studying, or how writing was something that was 'in the moment'. Students talked about writing as something that could be personally satisfying in ways that echoed what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls 'flow' and what Elbow referred to as 'heightened intensity' (2000: 127). These views are then considered in light of the policy context that positions students as consumers. The climate of employability narratives across the UK HE

sector may promote what Molesworth *et al* (2009) refer to the consumer-led 'having' mode, but in student writing, some students resist such notions.

Simon, Amelia and Lydia shared with me the times that they simply enjoyed writing. Simon talked about writing as something that he enjoyed if the topic was of interest to him. He was confident in writing and found it fairly straightforward to understand the rules of writing. Amelia was a first year Law student. Amelia also felt confident about writing and felt that writing was well supported by the University. Amelia suggested that the research element of writing was something that she found particularly enjoyable. Lydia was a third year Biochemistry and Biology student. Lydia expressed how she harboured a deep love for the disciplines she studied. Lydia confessed at the end of the interview, that she had realised how much she enjoyed writing based on the conversation we had together. She summarised how she felt writing was "nice", "fun" and "interesting". She shared these types of views while also seeing writing as a bit of a game that required some strategic playing on the part of the student. Extracts from all three students are as shown below:

I: Okay, and is writing something you would say you enjoyed?

Simon: Yes, I would say it is. Obviously it.....the issue is, you are quite restricted with regards to certain topics but overall I would say that writing is something....you know.....provided you are with the topic you enjoy or something you would like to write about, then definitely.

Amelia: it is exciting when you find something you really want to include in an essay

Lydia: I think now after having a conversation with you I probably realise that I do actually like writing, before you just kind of think of it as oh sugar I've got another assessment to do but then when you think about it and think about what you've remembered from what you wrote and what you've read; it is nice, it's fun, it's interesting.

The way that Simon, Amelia and Lydia talked about writing suggested that gaining personal satisfaction from writing was part of their developing academic literacies. Writing was seen as related to personal growth, discovery and self-satisfaction in ways that are commensurate with other literature (*see* Higgins, Hartley and Skelton 2002; Naude, Nel, van der Watt and Tadi 2016). The views that students shared about their academic literacies, as stories of personal growth, depart from the ways that student writing isolates and marginalizes (see Hyland 2002). These insights into the successes of academic literacies show how else students may view and account for their experiences in the academy that are not as readily accounted for within literature pertaining to student writing.

Ivy studied Psychology and Media Communications and by the time I spoke to her, she had graduated from university. On the whole, Ivy talked in very positive ways about writing. It was something she enjoyed, and found challenging but all the while rewarding. Ivy talked about enjoying writing once she found her stride in writing. Ivy referred to writing a dissertation. She spoke of how at the start it was difficult but that once writing started, it got easier and soon after she was able to enjoy, in ways perhaps similar to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) notion of 'flow'. Ivy suggested that she was "able to get into the flow of writing":

Ivy: Once I got into the flow of it, the flow of writing for assessments, that was when I enjoyed it. It is the initial putting pen to paper or your fingers to the keyboard or what not, was really difficult getting that head start especially when it came to writing a dissertation, you just know that the first 100 words count. It was quite a struggle but I found as long as you had the research in place and had a rough outline of where your argument was going, once you got started with an introduction you would quickly be able to get into the flow of writing

The notion of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990) was something that Brenda talked about as something she experienced when her writing was nearing the final stages of production. Brenda also mentioned feelings of pride akin to Murray and Moore's (2006) summary of when writing feels good. She talked about reviewing her writing to see if it "makes sense" and "flows properly". Brenda reflected on feeling happy with her work in ways that suggested that first and foremost, she wanted to please herself rather than others. Brenda explained to me:

Brenda: I think once you have finished and you read it through and it all flows properly and you look back at the question and you know that its answered the question, I think that is satisfying, because when you write it you think it doesn't really make sense, but once you have read it and tweaked it and read it again, that's good.

Both Ivy and Brenda expressed an apparent happiness in relation to writing as something that they could do and do well in. Their experiences tended not to dwell on the problems of writing and instead conveyed what they saw as the moments of success and enjoyment in writing.

For other students, expressions of contentment in relation to writing were much more fleeting. Robbie, for example, was a first year Law student. Robbie talked frequently of how

writing was more of a game that you had to work out without any real support from the people who made the rules. He often felt he needed to achieve high grades and therefore writing became a pursuit of grades rather than knowledge and that this was something that he found "depressing". However, amidst these types of views, Robbie did once talk about how writing became satisfying when "on a roll" and it's "coming out faster than you expected". The sentiments that Robbie attributes to writing is comparable to Elbow's (2000: 127) view on writing as 'heightened intensity'; or an innately enjoyable process that contains moments when words land on the page in a way that feels satisfying. In a similar way, Fromm likens the 'being' mode to activities that involve 'producing something and remaining related to what I produce' (2017: 78). Robbie's extract can be viewed in this way. While normally writing felt too much like pursuing particular grades, he had experienced times when writing just felt good:

I: Right. What are the most satisfying aspects of academic writing?

Robbie: I'm not sure....the writing, or understanding it properly and like kind of being on a roll with what you're doing. Like once you have a plan to follow and then you're typing it out and it's coming out faster than you expected... It's basically conquering it I suppose, that's the best part.

Robbie used a type of metaphorical language to talk about the satisfying nature of writing. Robbie talked of "conquering" writing. By conquering writing, one is becoming dominant over it, and therefore writing, in this case, is talked about as something that is being mastered. It may be useful to think about Robbie's conquering in the same way that Lizzio, Wilson and Simons (2002: 28) talked about 'felt outcomes' that better reflect 'global evaluations of accomplishment' (ibid 2002: 28). Claiming a victory over writing by taking

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part in the challenge of writing is "the best part", according to Robbie. In essence, there are times when doing well in writing *while in the throes of writing* simply feels good.

So far, the students that I have discussed have talked about writing in ways that resonate with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) notion of 'flow'. These aspects of writing can be understood as capturing the 'successes and progression' (Lea and Street 1998: 158) in academic literacies from the student point of view. In other words, the accounts can be viewed as counter narratives to the writing struggles often highlighted in relation to research on and about student writing. In Robbie's case, he talked about writing being in the moment and therefore, his articulation was considered in relation to Fromm's 'being' mode and Lizzio et al's (2002: 28) notion of 'felt outcomes'.

Fromm's modes of having and being, as applied by Molesworth, Nixon and Scullion (2009), confers the difference between Higher Education as amassing capital or as a way towards achieving personal transformation. Molesworth *et al's* (2009) adaptation of Fromm's work articulates how degrees are sold on the basis of the 'having' mode in order 'to secure future material affluence' (Molesworth *et al's* 2009: 280). The 'being' mode, on the other hand – understood as 'an investment of the self' (Molesworth *et al's* 2009: 280) - is increasingly demoted in the way degrees are articulated as an attractive venture to would-be students.

Lydia, Ivy, Robbie and Melanie talked about writing in ways that, at times, could be understood as more befitting Fromm's 'being' mode. Lydia, Ivy and Robbie have so far been introduced as students who enjoyed writing and achieved either a sense of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi's 1990) or saw writing as a matter of personal rewards (Murray and

Moore 2006). Together with extracts from the interview I had with Melanie, I draw on aspects of their accounts that can be thought of in terms of Fromm's 'being' mode. In doing so, I explore how students sometimes aligned themselves with the more traditional notions of Higher education through their writing.

Lydia talked about writing as a way to discover new things. Within her course, she was required to write about topics that sat outside of normal module delivery. Lydia said how she enjoyed these types of assessment as they offered freer scope to explore topics that she would not get the chance to do otherwise. She liked, in particular, how such assignments allowed her to research something 'new', and also prompted her to connect the topics to existing modules so that she could build up a more comprehensive picture of the subject she was studying. Lydia valued the freedom and free rein that she had during these types of assessments. She explored these feelings in the following way:

Lydia: So it's like, it's given me outside reading for that module number one and then its allowed me to kind of understand the module more, if that makes sense, so that's one thing I like about my course as well is that many of my modules are kind of, they overlap and stuff and like your in-course assessments allow you to like discover new things from different modules. I don't know how to explain what I mean, so for example one of my modules about arthritis and just about how you know it's hard to, we don't really know what causes it and stuff like that and another module has told me to write about my RNAs in disease and diagnosis so it's like I've taken that title from that module and used it to kind of look at how can we diagnosis and treat arthritis if that makes sense?

Lydia's appreciation of developing a wider disciplinary view seems more like 'being' as opposed to 'having' in the way that Molesworth *et al* (2009) apply Fromm's work. Fromm

suggests 'being' as a mode being devoted to developing your own 'system of thought, enrichening and widening it' (Fromm 2017: 25). In this instance, Lydia can be thought of as applying 'human powers' (Fromm 2017: 76) to think through problems. Lydia's views on writing are able to soak up the more 'centrifugal forces' (Thesen 2014: 6) that are 'more hybrid, experimental and open' (*ibid* 2014: 6). In other words, learning becomes about problem-solving within the discipline and not information hoarding for 'having' in a way that benefits only the individual.

Ivy talked about enjoying the moments when she was working with theorists and applying theoretical works into her writing. Ivy showed a kind of appreciation for 'in the now' when writing was enjoyable and exciting for no other reason than the actual act of writing. The sense of satisfaction Ivy spoke of was also implied in how Robbie accounted for writing as a personally satisfying endeavour. The key words that resemble Fromm's 'being' mode over the 'having' mode can be seen to include "enjoyed", "exciting" and a "sense of progression". These words reflect how Ivy and Robbie saw writing as something that was by itself rewarding and enjoyable, and containing feel-good factors (Cain and Poole 2011). In turn, they said:

Ivy: I really enjoy embedding a lot of arguments within theory and interpreting what theorists say and how that is applicable to the essay question and the areas you are covering.

Robbie: I suppose when you're impressed by what you're writing, when it's above the standard that you'd normally expect from yourself. There is a sense of progression.

Ivy's recounts on "really enjoying embedding a lot of arguments" and Robbie's views on "a sense of progression" echo the ways that students might be understood as aligning writing more with the 'centrifugal forces' (Thesen 2014: 6). Or in other words, ways that offer 'more hybrid, experimental and open' (*ibid* 2014: 6) avenues for writing at undergraduate level.

Melanie was a recent graduate of Social Work. Melanie found writing rewarding but not without its challenges. The key challenges tended to be talked about in terms of variation of staff expectations and the grading of work, as well as a type of class-anxiety that Melanie felt could often swell up amongst her peers in the run-up to assignment deadlines. Nevertheless, Melanie suggested how, overall, writing had allowed her to become more critical in her overall outlook. Melanie talked about her changing world-view and how her sense of being had developed in ways that suggested some kind of transformative shift from 'having' to 'being'.

Melanie: When you look at my essays now from first year to third year, I get to the point better, I get the evidence base, especially the evidence base, and am research minded so you kind of...if I read the journal in year one I would, yes, kind of, I like that point, yes put it in. Whereas in the third of year, we have been taught, well who has been funded for that research, who is writing it, what is the point they are trying to write it from, who are they trying to argue for, and that really kind of came across in the third year especially.

Fromm states that: '*Having knowledge* is taking and keeping possession of available knowledge (information); *knowing* is functional and serves only as a means in the process of productive thinking' (Fromm 2017: 34). Thus in distinguishing 'having' as 'having knowledge' and 'being' as 'knowing', Fromm's thinking can be used to think about how Melanie has

aligned herself towards something more akin to the 'being' mode. Melanie recalled what she learned from writing in ways that expressed certain changes in her world outlook. Melanie found that over time, she became more critical, more aware and more questioning. Her experiences in writing contributed to a transformation in mind-set that Melanie recognised and appeared to be grateful for. Whereas much focus on student writing has concentrated on loss (*see* Ivanic 1998; Francis, Robson and Read 2001; Pittam *et al* 2009),Melanie's account on this point suggests what was *gained* from writing: a new world-view and ability to respond critically.

Academic Literacies suggests itself as a useful frame to reveal the 'successes and progression' as well as the 'failure and non-completion' (Lea and Street 1998: 158) in relation to student writing. However, Academic literacies has tended to concentrate on the latter which means much less is known about the ways in which students forge positive relationships with writing in academia. Therefore, the accounts explored here add a little more weight to this overlooked area of Academic Literacies by focusing on Thesen's (2014) notion of 'voice' and the centrifugal aspects of writing. The extracts from the students undermine the way that Fromm's 'have' mode has been used to detail the condition of the undergraduate student culture. The students I spoke to saw writing in a range of ways, not just in consumer terms, and their relationships with writing were complex and varied.

5.5 Summary of chapter

Within the student interviews, there are discernable instances in which students saw possibilities and opportunities in writing. The chapter has chartered these instances to

convey the ways in which a sense of 'voice' (Thesen 2014) sometimes carried in student writing. These instances can also be understood as having implications for Academic Literacies in a number of ways. Firstly, a small number of student writers talked about writing in ways that connected them to 'spaces' (Gee 2004) beyond the 'institutional relationships of power and authority' (Lea and Street 1998: 157). Secondly, using 'centrifugal forces' (Thesen 2014: 6) some of the students have been discussed as seemingly resisting 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6). To this end, some student accounts were discussed as in some ways attuned to depositing aspects of themselves into writing, such as: humour, style or creativity. It was mooted that inclinations such as these were less accounted for in the Academic Literacies literature despite a mandate to: 'throw light on failure or non-completion, as well as success and progression' (Lea and Street 1998: 158). Collectively, the pockets of opportunities and possibilities in writing that the students spoke of can be seen to hold important clues about the ways that consumer logic is resisted in today's HE climate.

Chapter 6: Between a rock and a hard place

6.1 Introduction

Subsumed in the student accounts so far discussed were aspects of the ways that writing could be a way to discover disciplines and to transform thinking. But another set of accounts emerged from the same set of student interviews, including with the students already introduced. In these other types of accounts, writing was talked about differently and as if it was something that equated to being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Certain 'centripetal forces' that shepherded writing were talked about in the form of staff preferences and assessment guidance. These types of centripetal forces sometimes became all-consuming leading to a loss of 'voice' and the adoption, to varying degrees, of ventriloquation. From these accounts, it can be understood how 'voice' can 'tilt' towards 'the centre' in a way that is talked about by some students as a type of loss, necessity or sacrifice.

6.2 Assessment Guidance as a pull to convention

Previously, I suggested that at times, Lydia, Ivy, Robbie and Melanie talked about writing in ways that were akin to Fromm's 'being' mode. In doing so, I discussed how student writers do not necessarily adopt wholesale the consumer logic that is promoted around Higher Education, and that academic literacies includes an appreciation for writing in its broadest

sense. Furthermore, students Simon, Ivy, Amelia and Brenda conceived of writing in more ways than achieving grades; they spoke of discovery, enjoyment and satisfaction in ways that denoted writing as involving 'centrifugal forces' (Thesen 2014: 6). I now turn attention to the times when students *did* talk about writing in a way that reflected more Fromm's 'having' mode, when emphasis was placed on *getting, having* or *reaching* grades. During these times, Amelia, Melanie and Simon (who we have heard about so far), and also Jade (who has not been discussed as yet) talked about writing in ways that suggested 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6). The more centripetal forces discussed by these students suggested the ways in which writing involved the explicit use of writing guidance and documentation such as assessment briefs, learning objectives and assessment criteria. The discussions illuminated the ways in which assessment guidance is becoming increasingly central in the way some students understand their writing endeavours as prompting 'unwanted yet sometimes potent effects of assessment on student learning' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271). While student use of these documents is unsurprising (that is why they are produced and made available to students), the way in which they are perceived by students and the extent to which they carrel student writing raises a new set of questions. The discussion aims to explore some of these 'unwanted' (Norton et al 2001: 271) effects on student writing, in ways that suggest students are increasingly cornered between a rock and a hard place. In doing so, what Norton *et al* (2001) referred to as 'tactics', will be explored with a particular emphasis on coming to understand how students reflect, feel and rationalise about writing in such ways.

Thesen's (2014: 6) notion of centripetal forces refers to the 'pulls towards convention' to help capture how the dominant and established ways of saying and knowing persist in

writing, but to the exclusion of other ideas and ways of saying. Applied, in relation to research writers in the Global South, the notion of self-censorship can be a useful way to start thinking about student writing. In student writing, conventions are made explicit via assessment guidance as a way to limit exclusion of writers new to the academy. However, a new type of debate is emerging over the propensity for guidance to become more and more like instruction in ways that start to inadvertently limit student voice, *and potentially the importance of understanding*, in writing. The debate is muddied by student inclinations that favour explicit guidance in a consumer-led system and staff encouragement to find ways to satisfy their student cohorts. I start with Amelia, Melanie, Simon and Jade to consider the ways in which assessment guidance is viewed as tantamount to 'getting grades' and draw upon Fromm's notion of 'having', as utilized by Molesworth et al (2009) alongside Thesen's (2014: 6) 'centripetal forces', to consider how writing is part of amassing capital. I discuss how these notions are balanced out, or otherwise, with Fromm's 'being' mode and Thesen's (2014: 6) 'centrifugal forces'.

Amelia has already been introduced and discussed in relation to feeling equipped and able to assert one's own voice in writing. Amelia was happy to write in simplistic terms if that made her writing more accessible - even though she was aware that this was not a style proposed by Law, the discipline she studied. However, in other ways, Amelia did talk about the importance of achieving certain grades, and therefore she appeared to be balancing the centrifugal force for writing in her own way, against the centripetal force to meet certain expectations. The careful weighing up between centripetal and centrifugal forces suggest a type of 'tilting point' in Amelia's thinking about her writing. Thesen's (2014: 15) notion of a 'tilting point' refers to the 'analytical space' (ibid 2014: 15) in which writers decide what to

write and what to omit – it is the time in writing when the conscious silencing of ideas and possibilities occur. Amelia talked about how she would check the learning outcomes a lot during writing but spoke about this, almost metaphorically, as checking "what points I have to hit". Amelia talked about using the learning outcome as a proxy 'tilting point' as a way of generating writing that adhered to writing based guidance. She said:

I: Yes, okay. So, how important are documents which tell you about the learning outcomes and assessment criteria?

Amelia: Yes, they are really useful, like I check up quite often. It is all online so I check up quite often on what exactly I am....what points I have to hit

Of particular interest is the phrase "points *I have to* hit". While Amelia enjoyed writing her own way, such a strategy had clear limits. Writing was also directed by the centering pull of the learning outcomes. Amelia suggested she used the learning outcomes "quite often" to write "on what exactly" needs to be "hit" suggesting a checklist mentality. The learning outcomes steered her writing one way, but Amelia's desire to write simplistically steered her writing another way. What was written in the end can be thought of as a mix of centripetal and centrifugal factors.

In further examples, Amelia talked about how the criteria was "in the back of her mind" when writing and, in particular, "to get certain grades". Amelia's writing becomes closer to a type of 'mouthpiece' (Ivanic 1998: 50) that aims to produce work that is more likely to be

rewarded by the academy (Samuelson 2009) when working with "guidance and frameworks". As she put it:

Amelia: I try and apply how I write to the guidance and frameworks and stuff to see if I really am fitting in this, this and this to get this grade. So, yes, I always think I have got in the back of my mind the criteria that I need to fulfil to get certain grades, yes.

For Fromm, naming 'things' creates an illusion of fixedness. Once a thing is 'fixed' it is available to possess. Amelia stressed the importance of "getting" the grades thereby placing emphasis on the importance of 'having'. As Fromm suggests: 'Language is an important factor in fortifying the having orientation' (2017: 69). The 'getting' used by Amelia is indicative of her focus on 'having' a grade. Thus, Amelia can be seen as occupying both having and being modes in relation to the way she talked about her writing. This places Amelia in both of Norton *et al's* (2001: 274) 'meaning orientation' and 'reproducing orientation'. Norton *et al* (2001: 274) distinguishes essay-writing practices that confer a leaning towards a 'meaning orientation' and a leaning towards a 'reproducing orientation'. The orientations can be understood as a dotted line back to Marton and Saljo's (1976) seminal work on the differences between deep and surface learning. The former being an articulation of expansive learning and the latter an articulation of restrictive learning. In relation to the case of Amelia, she wanted to assert her own style and voice in her writing, and found ways in which she could do this. On the other hand, Amelia seemed intent to work with assessment guidance in order to "get certain grades". Amelia suggests devotion to deep learning but also, at times, accounted for ways in which she operated in more 'syllabus-bound' ways (Norton et al 2001: 274).

Melanie was also discussed in chapter 5. Melanie talked about how writing had led her to change her world-view and had become more critical in her outlook. Melanie too felt that marking criteria was a useful form of information for upping her grades in writing. Melanie mentioned the yearbook that describes grade boundary definitions and suggested how such information was a useful tool to "try and get the grades up". Melanie's account suggests how the boundary descriptors were used in ways to 'tilt' her writing. The 'pull towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6) relies on cues taken from a sense of what *should* be written. Melanie, like Amelia, is pulled to the conventions set out in writing guidance.

Melanie: you would get the marking criteria, which was a the back of...I don't know what it was called...the yearbook which gave titles and everything and you would look at that and think, right, that is alright, that is okay and make sure you had linked everything in to try and get the grades up.

Melanie describes what Norton et al (2001: 271) referred to as coming to know the 'rules of the game'. In this instance, the documentation made available to students is a device that catapults Melanie into ways of writing that are designed to maximize her potential grades.

Simon was another student who felt able to develop his own voice by using 'stuff' available to him. As seen, Simon was also certain about the rules of writing that afforded much less wriggle room. The ways in which he saw some rules as needing to be abided by, often appeared to be linked to maximizing grades. Simon suggested how essay guidance might be used to ensure that he can "roll out a decent mark". The choice of words "roll out" suggests a type of production line within which essays are produced on demand when the right sort

of guidance is at hand. Simon talked about referring to guidance at the end to double check that writing concurred as strongly as possible to writing guidance. As such, Simon seemed to suggest that centripetal forces shepherd his writing in the final stages of putting an essay together. Simon uses 'tactics' (Norton et al 2001) sparingly. The 'tilting point' appeared to be in its most overt form when writing is being checked – the final cut of what gets submitted and what does not.

I: Okay...umm...and how important do you think documents are such as learning outcomes and assessment criteria? Are those useful documents to you?

Simon: Well yes they are. A lot of the ones I have looked at give you a really structured outline because when you look at it, you can think, right, once you have finished your essay writing, you can think does my essay contain this, that and the other and ultimately roll out a decent mark.

Jade's story was a bit different. Jade has not yet been discussed, but some of her comments in the interview seem relevant to discuss here. Jade was a History and Education student. Unlike Amelia, Melanie and Simon, Jade did not appear to have sentiments about writing that leaned towards Fromm's 'being' mode. Jade's relationship with writing for assessment appeared to be much more skewed towards Fromm's 'having' mode, and aligned with reproducing rather than meaning orientations to learning (Norton *et al* 2001). Rather than carefully balancing out what she would like to write and what would be wise to write, the conversation with Jade was much more about what she felt she had to write most of the time. Jade's views expressed in the interview were generally more negative about writing compared to students discussed so far. Jade's views and accounts, therefore, suggest a stronger loss of voice brought about by a more dominating centripetal force.

Jade talked about "targets' as being something that "you need to do to get that mark". In a way, Jade appeared to talk about writing as something that was very much 'syllabus-bound' (Norton *et al* 2001: 269). Jade, like Amelia, talked about the grade as something that were pre-existing and out there waiting for her to net. The emphasis placed on 'getting' grades echoed again the way that Fromm describes the 'having' mode:

Jade: I really like the learning objectives...not the learning objectives, but, you know, like the target, what mark you will get for writing in what kind of style because you know what you need to do to get that mark.

Jade's account suggested that her writing is swayed by "what you need to do to get that mark". For Jade, the 'tilting point' (Thesen 2014: 15) can be thought about as more heavily influenced by what is centripetal, than by other more centrifugal forces, such as style, creativity, discovery and voice. Thus, the need to 'please the teacher' (Stockall and Cole 2016) is inscribed into the 'production' of writing in ways that appear to be 'unconnected with real learning' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271).

The way that Amelia, Melanie, Simon and Jade talked about 'having' grades intimated that assessment guidance was something that was useful to them. Marking criteria, writing guidance and learning objectives were all seen as useful tools to help achieve grades. So while assessment goaded writing in particular ways, it was not always seen as problematic. Moreover, for Amelia, Simon and Melanie, the need to write strategically in ways that involved using assessment guidance was balanced out via other 'felt outcomes' relating to

writing. To put it another way, writing wasn't just a one trick pony. Writing, for these students, was something that blended meaning and reproducing orientations (Norton et al 2001: 274). So while writing was configured centripetally, to an extent, this was offset by the times when writing was configured in more centrifugal ways.

But on the other side of the coin, assessment guidance was not only conceived of in terms of being useful writing aids that may, at times, lead to a minimum of 'unwanted' effects (Norton *et al* 2001: 271). To be more specific, writing guidance was also talked about in ways that suggested there were certain strongholds over what students felt they could and couldn't do in their writing. In these cases, the more 'potent effects of assessment' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271) often came to the fore. Additionally, the centripetal force submerged in writing guidance can become a push away from 'more hybrid, experimental and open forms' (Thesen 2014: 6) of writing. Many talked about instances where they felt they had to write in particular ways in order to obtain a particular grade. This type of experience has been articulated elsewhere as belonging to a type of 'assessment discourse' (Baker 2017: 25). Some of the students I talked to expressed both an acceptance and reluctance to write in this way - as if they were caught between a rock and a hard place.

Robbie, as already discussed, was a first year Law student when I met him. Robbie enjoyed writing when it felt as if he was "conquering" an essay, and therefore he seemed to suggest that he felt some genuine feelings of enjoyment towards writing. However, Robbie was also cynical about some of the ways in which writing had to be presented for assessment purposes. Robbie expressed how writing criteria limited and goaded writing in particular ways. Robbie spoke of how writing was "too rigid" with "very little room for movement"

because of "the grading criteria". Robbie's sentiments appeared to suggest that writing guidance was problematic for writing. Rather than aiding his writing, Robbie appeared to suggest it curtailed it. Robbie noted:

I: Okay, okay. And do you find academic writing a creative process?

Robbie: No.

I: No, not at all?

Robbie: No! I wish I did! It's too rigid to be creative, the boundaries are there

I: Okay. What's rigid about it?

Robbie: The criteria you're set to write about, the format it'll be assessed in, there's very little room for movement or different approaches to the writing you have to do. I suppose it's the grading criteria maybe limits what you can and can't write about.

The assessment discourse (Baker 2017) of writing highlights how students are concerned with how their writing will be graded. Robbie echoed this view but with an important distinction. The ways in which students felt restricted were often derived from perceptions about what was expected from them. Robbie's account of his writing experiences emphasised how the grading criteria created 'centripetal forces' (Thesen 2014: 6) in writing that dominated how student writing gets done. Robbie's views and accounts can be thought about in terms of Thesen's 'tilting point'. He has "little room for movement" and therefore

writing is restricted to certain ways. He seems less likely to be able to identify aspects of writing that may be available to him to enact agency when compared to writers such as Amelia, Marley, Veronica, Simon and Jimmy. Robbie's view, by contrast, indicated little scope for agency and conveys a type of 'prescriptivism' (Ivanic 1998: 11) in the way he writes.

Robbie's sense of restriction in writing appeared to be felt at different levels. He talked about an overriding sense of having to curtail his writing, but also felt there were restrictions in relation to the minutiae of writing. Robbie felt that writing guidance could become something that was overly directive and that the guidance (or as he called it, the "limitations") tended to "literally limit what you can write". Robbie talked about specific approaches he would and wouldn't take, and reflected in relation to references:

Robbie: I had to put 10 references for something, I'd put 7 and I'm this close to the word count, I'd then have to detract from some of my points and put other points in and then end up with a lower grade, just because of the specifications for it, when my answer could have been more developed without. So the limitations literally limit what you can write.

This instance shows a time that Robbie recalled when an essay that he was writing stipulated the exact need to include 10 references. On finding himself short of the number of references required, but also at the maximum word limit, Robbie felt he had to delete part of his argument in order to make room for three more references. In this case, the assessment prompts Robbie to write in ways that feel 'inauthentic, pointless and another hurdle to jump over' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271). Robbie found this to be an instrumental

approach to writing that led him to "detract some of my points". In other words, in order to meet the assessment criteria, Robbie felt he compromised part of his argument. As he put it: "limitations literally limit what you can write". Robbie appeared to feel as if he was made to make a compromise in his writing because of what the writing guidance was telling him to do.

Jade felt that assessment stipulations restricted what you might discuss in an essay for fear of losing marks. As she put it (in relation to assessment criteria): "if you didn't stick to what they say, then you weren't going to get that mark". One example of this can be found in Jade's comments about including some types of literature that could end up being 'off point'. Jade suggested she often had a desire to research more widely but explained how this was tempered with an apprehension that she would be pursuing literature that was not wanted. As Jade explained it:

I: Were they a hindrance in anyway?

Jade: I think they were because you were so worried about if you didn't stick to what they say, then you weren't going to get that mark. What about if you went off and looked at other areas, other research, what if you decided, actually I would like to look at how this is researched in a different culture, in France for example or look at how it is in Germany and compare it but it doesn't say to do that, so if you do that what are they going to mark you down and you have just wasted a load of words on adding your own....what you think would have been a good like idea so.....

In this extract, Jade can be seen as talking about criteria as a trapping device that stipulated too rigidly what must be included in writing. The criteria limited what she read and she

became mindful of not moving away from reading what was listed in order to "get that mark". This particular account conveys how students can feel trapped by writing and assessment guidance, and how it can appear 'unconnected with real learning' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271). For fear of getting it wrong and for fear of wasting words, Jade is stuck between a rock and a hard place and put off writing in ways that engender 'spontaneity, flow and play' (Thesen 2013: 116).

So far, assessment and writing guidance, in the way of assessment criteria and learning outcomes, have been discussed in terms of the way they contribute to the more centripetal forces in writing. But other types of writing guidance provoked similar 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6) in ways that perhaps overly constrained what students thought they could write. Erin and Melanie talked about the messages in writing guidance about referencing and plagiarism, and considered how these messages led them to alter and silence their writing.

Melanie talked about how her fear of plagiarising led her to avoid moving her writing into particular areas of debate. If a group discussion had revealed some interesting ideas on a particular subject, then Melanie felt unable to take that idea and follow it up within her own research for an essay:

Melanie: Yes, I can remember we had a....one of our lecturers who left in the first year but did a whole lecture on plagiarism and she was saying you can't do this, and you can't do that, and you can't do this and overall I remember thinking, "oh my God, I must have plagiarised my A levels if this was the case! I was so worried but you kind of clicked that it wasn't because it wasn't your own work, it was one of my things that I never wanted to do, in group level or others I was so worried about that, I think, in a sense that I would pick up ideas and

think that is a really good idea and then....no, I don't want to use that now because I might get done for this or

that, so it was hard to.....

Melanie held concerns about blurring the divisions between group work in the classroom and writing for assessment as an individual student. Her solution was to avoid, 'un-know' or to ignore what may have stimulated thought in class discussions. Group learning, in this instance, was perceived by Melanie as something that was incongruent with individual endeavours in writing. Applying group learning to writing, in Melanie's eyes, had the potential to constitute plagiarism, and therefore, meant care should be taken to avoid contaminating writing with others' ideas. Melanie's view suggests that what Gee (2004) referred to as 'spaces' might have some applicability to the way writing is viewed and accounted for by students. Melanie sees the discussions that students have about writing as separate from the moments she privately writes, and is compelled to keep apart these two types of 'spaces' (Gee 2004).

Erin talked about how she would sometimes avoid using journals simply because that would mean she wouldn't need to reference them. She feared getting referencing wrong to such an extent that she preferred to not use materials if she was unsure of how to reference them correctly - even if that meant curtailing the quality of her own argument. She said:

I: Do you see anxiety and stress amongst other students around essays and assignments?

Erin: Yes, I do. It is the same around referencing. That is a thing that people don't know how they are supposed to be referencing. Like how you are supposed to phrase a reference or the way you set it out. Even though that sounds a minute thing for an essay, it is massive because it really does, you spend so

much time making sure your references are in place more than actual contents and it sometimes puts you off wanting to use journals because you don't have to reference it, which obviously affects your writing and your marking content of the whole essay.

Erin's example suggests a new type of 'tactic'. Rather than operating in 'reproducing' (Norton *et al* 2001) ways, Erin chooses to avoid operating altogether. Her 'tactic' to simply not have to reference journal articles by not using them resembles how assessment can be seen as 'a powerful influence which does not always encourage students to take the desired deep approach' (Norton *et al* 2001: 272). Moreover, Erin's case suggests that rather than adopting surface learning, she was nudged by assessment conditions to shy away from learning – in this instance, to be less likely to pick up and read a journal article.

The types of issues that were raised by Robbie, Melanie, Jade and Erin suggests how, for undergraduate student writers, assessment and writing guidance can equate to a set of centripetal forces that restrict and narrow what gets written. The 'tilting point', involving the careful weighing up of what might be written and what should be written, can become overly influenced by what is felt as being at stake.

6.3 Individual Staff Preferences as a Pull to Convention

Students were very aware of individual staff desires when it came to writing. At times, student feeling around matching essay work with what staff wanted came across as particularly dominant in the way they thought about writing. Writing, in such cases, was led

by the beacon of working out 'what they are looking for'. In essence, the individual preferences of staff can also be viewed upon as 'pulls towards convention' (Thesen 2014: 6). These types of sentiments around aligning writing to the views of staff involved in marking came out particularly strongly in the interviews I had with Jade and Sookie. I start with an extract from the interview I had with Jade below:

Jade: Yes, yes, I think normally they are glad that you have asked and will normally help you out quite a bit. Obviously there is a limit, so sometimes they will be like, ah, well, just write what you think, I can't give you too much help with this. But then you are like, yes, but, if you give me a rubbish mark because I've not done what you personally like then that is going to be devastating because you could have just said now, I want you to look into this a bit more or I want you to include your own opinions or I don't want you to include your own opinions. So that can be difficult.

Jade used the word "devastating" to express how she would feel if she obtained a mark that she perceived to be "rubbish". Jade made a connection between the possibility of getting a rubbish mark and the personal expectations and preferences of the person marking the work. In other words, Jade made an immediate connection between meeting individual expectations and getting good grades. The articulation became personal when she addressed the marker directly in the statement: "if you give me a rubbish mark because I've not done what you personally like…". The words used by Jade highlights the power relations that are perceived by Jade. The marker is seen to have the power to mark work in ways that adhere to their own personal preferences. The student, on the other hand, is in a fragile position. What is trivial for the marker "what you personally like" – "like" being benign and casual – is of great significance for the student – with "devastating" being strong and impactful. The marker is seen as occupying a position where they can take a casual

approach to a piece of work (marking) in a way that is disproportionately important to the person who is on the receiving end. In this extract, Jade saw unequal positions of power involved in writing. The 'tilting point' that Jade's account suggests is strongly linked to the individual expectations of the marker. Getting at what these expectations are, Jade reported, is not always easy and it created difficulties in the way she approached writing.

Jade continued to describe how certain power dynamics, as she saw them, impacted on how other people reacted to writing for assessment. She suggested:

I: Do you think that your own views on writing are common place across all students?

Jade: I think that a lot of students would feel it was quite restricting and forced. I know because a lot of my friends have ended going up to the lecturers...I don't really know what you want, what you want me to write, what you don't want...whereas in my opinion it should not be like, what do you want me to write

Jade noticed a particular trend in her peers that involved fellow students asking lecturers what they should write in order to avoid being marked negatively. The confusion over what to and what not to write indicated a type of precision in the way that some students might think about writing for assessment. In this example, there is a need to know exactly what should be written as Jade says "I don't really know what you want, what you want me to write, what you don't want…". The individual desires of the marker becomes a dominant pull for the tilting point in student writing in this case. The student writer adopts a 'prescriptivist' (Ivanic 1998) approach in their writing. The scope to be able to write in more

agential ways within the 'meaning orientation' (Norton et al 2001: 274) is closed off. As Jade states, writing for assessment is "restricting and forced".

Implicit within the view that writing requires the writer to produce work that adheres to the precise preferences of the lecturer, is the idea that writing is either right or wrong - even for disciplines characterized by debate and perspective. I turn to Sookie next to explore how debate can become quashed and replaced with notions of right and wrong answers in relation to student writing. Sookie was a graduate of History and Education. Sookie had started university with a love for writing. Over time, Sookie found her enjoyment for writing slipped away. Sookie reflected on how she eventually came to see writing for assessment as a right or wrong venture:

I: Okay, okay. Has your view of academic writing changed since you started University?

Sookie: Well, in High School it was a lot different. I don't they are really the same.....umm...

I: Did it change over the course of the three years?

Sookie: Well, yes, in the beginning I used to enjoy it! I didn't think it would be as rigid as it is and I think, coming to the end of my third year, I think certain things are like...with dissertation set amounts are expected of you and it would be nicer if it was a bit more free....free speech maybe and less, like, strict in what you have to, what you can't say and that kind of thing. I did think it would be more....more...umm....just open, really more your own opinion and how your perspective.... instead of, there is a right and wrong answer. I thought it would be a lot more your own perspective

Sookie's account suggested how her view of writing changed over time. Her view had moved from one of "free speech" to one of 'right and wrongs answer[S]". In other words, through writing, Sookie developed the view that there are certain things that can be said and certain things that have to be said, if to do well in writing. In other words, writing in the academy meant letting go of "free speech". Sookie appeared to accept that writing should be to 'ventriloquate' (Ivanic 1998: 50). Sookie's account suggested how she adhered to the centripetal forces in writing so much so that 'the mouthpiece for language which is not your own' (Ivancic 1998: 50) became her *established* practice. Writing is not talked about as part of developing ways to 'reaccent' (Haworth 1999: 100) ideas, theories and thinking in academia. The heteroglossic (Vice 1997), or double-voiced (Chatterjee-Padmanabhan 2014: 101), nature of writing instead appears to be accelerating within this student account of writing.

The way that some students saw writing as a right or wrong pursuit led to frustrations in coming to understand what would be seen as the right way to write, and what would be the wrong way. Sentiments such as these in some cases appeared to put some strain on the relationships that students had with their tutors – relationships could become one of demands or feeling as if tutors should 'cut to the chase' in what they wanted from their students. An example of this instance is below:

Jade: I feel sometimes you are marked down because you haven't done exactly what they said on their little guideline because you have looked at it in a different way, that can seem unfair sometimes, so you end up going to the lecturer and like being...what do you want me to write, tell me what you want me to write, I will bullet point it and I will go home and write it.

Jade feared being "marked down". This articulation suggested that she felt she could be punished for not aligning her writing to her lecturer's views. The feeling of powerlessness appeared to lead to a type of exacerbation in this particular example as Jade claims: "you end up" asking "what do you want me to write, I will bullet point it and I will go home and write it". There is both acceptance and defiance in the stance. Jade appeared to accept that this is the writing approach that she must take, and yet also she is defiant – almost daring the lecturer to give them the points so that they can show them that they can and are willing to do it. This type of prescriptivism is different to an osmosis of academic socialization (Lea and Street 1998) in order to become part of the 'statusful community' (Ivanic 1998: 83) but rather a conscious fudge in order to temporarily enact being part of the 'statusful community'. In other words, the tilting point embraces ventriloquation and exaggerates heteroglossia to achieve specific ends and provoke 'less desirable strategies' (Norton *et al* 2001: 272). Therefore, the prescriptivism that Jade refers to is a temporal prescriptivism designed to temporarily align writing with what is being perceived as being expected and subsequently deserving of higher grade boundary marks. These traits in writing portray a different view of what traditional functions of Higher Education purport, such as discovery and exploration and instead favour compliance and conformity as a way to do what it takes to make the grade. Jade's case exemplifies another way that student writers can feel as if they are stuck between a rock and a hard place.

While Jade's account expressed exasperation with being stuck between a rock and a hard place, other students felt that the no-win situation they were in with writing was simply something to abide by. Jimmy talked about being stuck as an annoyance but a necessity.

Robbie talked about being stuck as inevitable unless you were a high-achieving student who could risk their grades by playing around with their writing.

As we have seen so far with Jimmy, he felt he could enact agency in writing and saw his audiences as multiple including future patients. But Jimmy also talked about "following the guidelines strictly to get a grade", and how this was "the wrong approach, but necessary sometimes". In this part of the interview, Jimmy recognized how writing consisted of certain compromises that he just needed to make. His view appeared to be that if a particular individual wants writing done in a particular way then he would resign himself to adjust his writing to meet those demands. For Jimmy, not writing entirely in the way he would prefer to was a small sacrifice. Although Jimmy felt slightly ill at ease with writing in this way, he saw it as necessity - a means to an end. Therefore, the 'tilting point' for Jimmy appeared to be led by the centripetal forces of individual preferences with a mix of reluctance and pragmatism. Jimmy said:

I: What did you do, did you chase it up at all?

Jimmy: No, I just bore it in mind for the next one I did, that one wasn't assessed it was a practice, it was a formative and I got the marking back and I thought it was okay, it was how I'd always done them and I've always been fine at them. I took the…, I guess it's bad really, I took the advice they gave for why I was marked down and just applied it to my next piece of work to make sure the grade was okay. Whether it was right or not, I mean, I guess it didn't do any harm but I just think it's slightly unnecessary to… it's an example of following the guidelines very strictly to get a grade rather than for the actual piece of work itself. I don't like that, I prefer, yeah basically, I don't like following the guidelines religiously just for the sake of getting the marks. I think that's the wrong approach, but necessary sometimes.

In a later section of the interview, Jimmy talked about the meaninglessness of having individual markers having particular wants and desires in their students' writing. Jimmy suggested that those who are "valuable" in the University have more sway and more scope to demand what they want – including how their own students produce writing. For Jimmy, this was "annoying" but not problematic. He saw it as something that had to be accounted for in the way you write. In other words, to do well in writing Jimmy accepted that he needed to satisfy the preferences of particular lecturers by adopting particular practices that were sometimes bespoke to the 'marker'. I explored the implications of that with him:

I: Is that a source of worry, those inconsistencies?

Jimmy: No, because you can work around it, it's more annoying. If there's going to be a department guideline on something or a national guideline doing something, stick to that, don't make your students… just because you have a personal hate about doing a particular type thing. Just teach your students the proper way to do it. It's just annoying really and slightly dogmatic of the lecturers.

Jimmy claims "you can work around it". In this particular case, it is not so much the 'statusful community' (Ivanic 1998: 83) that matters but, the 'statusful individual'. Therefore, writing for Jimmy involves adhering at times to the specificities of assessment (Norton *et al* 2001) but also the specificities of staff preferences (Lea and Street 1998).

Robbie felt insecure about his grade profile and therefore felt unable to write in ways that might be seen as 'risky'. Robbie seemed to recognize that writing allowed for 'voice' and more centrifugal forces but that this was a set of freedoms that existed only for already

high-achieving students. For Robbie, who referred to himself as "someone who's getting lower band marks", he understood his position as someone who must work within the restrictions and adhere closely to the guidelines. Writer voice was therefore seen as a type of privilege reserved for students achieving higher marks. About this, he said:

I: Okay. And are you likely to take any risks in writing? Are you likely to go and explore something different or unusual?

Robbie: I think that's more of a privilege for people who know they're going to get a higher band mark. In most of my work practice assessments I'm around the 2:2 to 2:1. I don't think I've got a first in anything yet. If I was consistently getting firsts really, it's high 2:1s, then I would be willing to explore something, be a bit more creative in my writing. But for someone who's getting lower band marks, that could take away from it. So it's not a risk that someone like me could take

For Robbie, the rock and the hard place are different again. He sees writing as trapping because of his perceived low grade profile. For Robbie, this means he is stuck. He must stick to what he is being asked for as strictly and as rigidly as possible. This means that writing in ways that are for 'spontaneity, flow and play' (Thesen 2013: 116) harnessing 'edgework' (Thesen 2014) is something that is out of bounds. If Robbie risked it, he could lose his footing on achieving a 2:1 grade.

Student writing as stuck between a rock and a hard place can be seen as something that can be experienced in different ways for different student writers. For Jade and Sookie, it entailed aping the actual views of the lecturers. In these cases, writing was talked about as something prescriptive in order to meet the expectations of the 'statusful community'

(Ivanic 1998: 83) of the university – even if this meant becoming insincere in writing. Writing therefore was used as a tool to temporarily align oneself with what was perceived as expected from them in the academy in ways that suggest 'less desirable strategies' (Norton *et al* 2001: 272) in writing. For Jade and Sookie, writing required a type of ventriloquation in which heteroglossic tendencies were exacerbated. Both Jimmy and Robbie expressed views and accounts of writing that seemed to amount to being stuck between a rock and a hard place in a different kind of way. Robbie could see how agency might be enacted in and through writing, but did not dare to write in such ways for fear of damaging his marks. Jimmy saw how individual idiosyncrasies mattered and how this led to what he saw as necessary changes in his own writing.

6.4 When the pull to convention makes writing meaningless

So far in this chapter, we have looked at nine of the students I talked to about writing. The collective range of views and accounts talked about by the students so far reflect the different ways in which undergraduate writing can feel like being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Seven of those students talked about the way they worked with assessment guidance to maximize their grades. Four felt that assessment guidance could be useful to aid grade attainment, but the others felt it could bind their writing in ways that felt restrictive. Sookie and Jade reported the times when they wrote in ways that they thought matched the views of their lecturers. Sometimes these discussions appeared to suggest an erosion of voice in relation to writing and this was recounted as a type of loss. For Robbie and Jimmy, losing voice was a type of necessity and their views were expressed in pragmatic terms.

But there is always a cost attached to being stuck between a rock and a hard place. While writing in ways that are centrifugal can be risky, and can lead to a loss of marks and a lower grade, on the other hand, writing in ways that lean too much to centripetal forces may feel rather meaningless. The final section of this chapter will introduce further times when students have felt that the more centripetal forces 'tilt' their writing in over-bearing ways. The seven cases I will explore next will help consider how being stuck between a rock and a hard place can make writing feel meaningless.

First, I return to Robbie. I discussed earlier how Robbie talked about adding footnotes that detracted from developing other points, and how he resisted taking risks with his writing because he felt he was not secure enough to do so in his grades. But Robbie also suggested how he kept his 'eye on the prize' in writing and achieving "a higher standard". Robbie therefore seemed to feel compelled to write in restrictive ways in order to try to obtain higher grades. As a result, writing lost its meaning for Robbie. He said:

I: Okay. Do you think about what grades you might get during the writing process?

Robbie: Yes, a lot.

I: A lot? Does it impact on the way you approach writing?

Robbie: Yes, it makes me want to go for a higher standard but at the same time it stresses me out. It doesn't help.

I: Do you think it impacts on how you, what you include, what you don't include, how you write it, the amount of references you include?

Robbie: Yes and it can make me write things which are pretty irrelevant, just like including another reference or another footnote or another point and it stops me from developing other points. And the word count, that too..

We can see with Robbie the cost of being stuck between a rock and a hard place. He was stuck because he felt unable to move away from the restrictive guidance due to seeing his grades as not high enough. Therefore, he cannot write in more satisfying ways and must write in rigid ways. His positioning between the rock and the hard place appeared to lead him to seeing writing endeavours as rather meaningless. As he puts it: "it can make me write things which are pretty irrelevant". These views suggest learning risks becoming 'inauthentic' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271). If learning is inauthentic at Higher Education levels then it must be questioned not tolerated. As Thesen (2014: 6) suggests 'when voices do not carry as hoped, we must ask why'. Robbie's sentiments intimate how writing may fail to offer 'meaning orientations' and falter to leave room only for 'reproducing orientations' (Norton *et al* 2001: 274).

Joss, the year three student of Medicine, expressed similar costs in relation to the use of marking schemes. As we have discussed in relation to Joss so far, she saw opportunities in writing to make a difference in the professional field of medicine. Writing meant that ideas could potentially be communicated to other audiences and therefore Joss saw writing as in some ways a privilege. However, Joss sometimes suggested that she struggled with marking schemes when they became too rigid. Her account suggested that there were times when

she felt distanced from the topic she was studying because of feeling that she was being expected to write in specific ways. In Joss's situation, writing was talked about as becoming something mechanical and that led to: "just saying things for the sake of saying them". She stated:

Joss: we have to write these OSCARS but I can't even remember what the acronym stands for, but you write a case study and you have to answer three questions about that case study and they are formatted, so it is a template which can be used in any area you are studying. It's frustrating because you feel like you are writing to a marked scheme or to a…something you know you are just saying things for the sake of saying them rather than what you actually want to write about or what you actually mean. So that can be really frustrating.

In this account, marking schemes can be seen as something that could potentially disrupt what the student might want to communicate about and explore in their writing. Thus, marking schemes can lead to writing experiences more likely to appear as an activity that is without meaning. Again, the assessment *inter alia* is one that prompts 'reproducing' over 'meaning' orientations (Norton *et al* 2001: 274). For Joss, the marking scheme restricts writing but there is no other way to go about writing. Joss's predicament is not dissimilar to the concerns raised by Fulford (2009). Fulford (2009) warned against the use of writing frames fearing that their use directs writing in a way that directs thinking. For Joss, this is a worry that is shared. Joss finds herself stuck between a rock and a hard place and the cost is to forego: "what you actually want to write and what you actually mean".

Erin, Gayle, Jade and Sookie gave further examples of when they felt they had to write in meaningless ways. As discussed in chapter 5, Erin felt that she could make a real

contribution with her dissertation and speak for people with little rights or control over their lives. However, the way that Erin viewed her grasp over 'voice' in her "project" sits in sharp contrast to how she viewed her grasp over 'voice' in other types of writing. Erin suggested that her project work allowed her to "go anywhere with that". Her essays, however, were bound by the 'centripetal forces' (Thesen 2014: 6) that she identified as "the lecturers know what they are looking for". Although Erin had a taste of writing in more centrifugal ways, in most of her work, she felt she needed to produce the sort of work that was "wanted". She rationalized:

I: Do you feel as if you have free scope to explore things of your choosing, can you go off in novel directions, do you feel you can be a driving force in the way your essay is constructed?

Erin: No, I don't. I really don't. The lecturers know what they are looking for in the essays so you point score and make sure you are hitting all of that so......I did with my project, I could go anywhere with that but with the academic essays more, no I didn't.

Erin's views and accounts can be understood as a 'tilting point' that leans very much in favour of what she thinks her lecturers require her to write. She sensed freedom in her project work, but saw restrictions in her essay work. She talked about writing as being led by a type of prescriptivism (Ivanic 1998) in a way that suggested she was almost cut out of the picture. Erin is stuck in the 'reproducing orientation' (Norton *et al* 2001) and sees writing as a type of loss in ways that are comparable to Thesen's (2014) thinking on writing erasures and silences. Erin suggested how writing was reduced to "hitting" and "scoring" points in order to satisfy 'teacher-imposed demands' (Scott 2005: 299). The way she

approached writing tasks, was spoke about as something prompted by the lecturers who had specific things that they were looking for in student essays.

As we have seen, the notion that writing essays is a process of working out what they are looking for was not unique to Erin. I move to Gayle's accounts next to explore how she also used a similar type of articulation when she reflected on writing essays for her assessment. Gayle, introduced in chapter 6, was a second year student studying Physics and Business Management. Gayle shared with me that there seemed to be a perception amongst her cohort that they had to "mirror" one of the lecturer's own writing preferences in order to do well in one particular module:

I: Okay and is that inconsistency across preferences? Is that a source of anxiety at all? Is it a worry to you or to your peers?

Gayle: Yeah because obviously it depends what you're writing as well and what you need to focus on and what you need to bear in mind. Last semester we were actually told by the tutees that the lecturer has got a style of writing that you need to mirror and that was what she was looking for and that's the way she marks. So we were a bit like, okay.

Gayle suggested how assessments could amount to pleasing the 'teacher' (Scott 2005: 299). The case Gayle talked about refers to the ways that Academic Literacies suggest that students need to learn to bend their writing to particular individual preferences for different assignments (Lea and Street 1998). The idea of "mirroring" that Gayle spoke of takes this a step further and resembles more closely Ivanic's (1998) notion of prescriptivism. Gayle was accepting of these 'centripetal forces' (Thesen 2014) as steers for this particular assignment.

I return to Jade next. Jade appeared to suggest that she felt particularly powerless as a student writer. She saw the lecturer as the gatekeeper with the control over what counts as worthy knowledge and understanding. Jade saw no point in railing against the view of the tutor because not only would this course of action do no good, but it could actually cause harm. Jade pointed out that if she persevered with a different standpoint to what her lecturer believed in her essay then she might end up with a "crap mark" or even "fail this module". This was Jade's rock and a hard place. The stakes that Jade perceived in this scenario were high, and therefore her chosen course of action was to relent. Jade resembled her argument in her writing to that of the views expressed by the lecturer within the seminar discussions. Effectively, Jade gave up her own voice and adopted another. As a result, writing was something that sacrificed 'desires to learn in a personally satisfying way' (Hounsell 1997: 107). This was the cost of being stuck between a rock and a hard place for Jade – a loss of voice (Thesen 2014). I quote at length in order to convey the strength of feeling that was conveyed to me by Jade:

Jade: But I had one lecturer where I really struggled with this and we learnt about free schooling so it was an Education module and we learnt about...do you know what free schools are? (I; yes) so they choose whether they go to classes and stuff and I...and the lecturer was very strong about this in fact...oh, that is a really good idea like it encourages people to do what they want to do and not what they have to do and I was like the only one in the class that thought this was ridiculous. If I had had the choice whether I wanted to go to school or not, or whether I wanted to go fishing for the day, or learn about chemistry I know which one I would have done and I am sure I wouldn't have gone to History class even though that is now what I really enjoy and what I am passionate about. But I do think you need to be nurtured and guided when you are younger and for it not just to be.....oh, you know what, do what you want. At 4 years

old....oh, don't worry about going to English because it is a bit boring at that age, and I thought that was

ridiculous and others think it is a great idea, it nurtures creativity and things and I said that and he was

horrified.....how can you think that way, it is so like...that is so awful that you feel like you are holding the

country back and everything. Like it just seems so rigid and old fashioned to feel that way and I thought if

I write my essay in the way I actually feel, he is going to completely give me a crap mark for it and I am

going to fail this module, so I just wrote about how wonderful it was and everything.

And Jade added:

Jade: I couldn't voice what I thought and it was very dependent on what the lecturer thought the right

answer is, not your argument as such.

In another instance, Sookie recounted how she wrote "what was expected of me and what I needed to fit in". She further stated that as time went by in her studies, this increasingly became the trend in her writing approaches. She found herself: "sculpting it more around what they wanted to hear and less about what I really thought". The development of this writing strategy over time shows that the more Sookie was exposed to writing for assessment, the more she adopted prescriptivism and bent towards centripetal forces. The transformative potential of Higher Education ebbed away as Sookie's own sense of 'what to do' in her writing was shaped ever more by a perceived need to provide what 'they' wanted to hear. In her words:

Sookie: I put too much pressure on myself and cram in too many things and I don't think a lot of my

writing flowed nicely, if I was just writing it out for pleasure maybe or...you know....not with a desired

goal at the end of it, then it might have been, it might have come from more inside of me and less of what was expected of me and what I needed to fit in.

I: Did you feel as if you had to let go of yourself a little bit then?

Sookie: Yes, yes. I didn't think it would overly matter of my opinion....a lot of the time I think I was disagreeing with what I wrote so, which was quite frustrating but I don't think your opinion matters much.

I: And did you do that in order to give the answer that....?

Sookie: Yes, yes. I think in the beginning it was a bit more my opinion but then I realised that wasn't really working and then I think towards the third year it was ,yes, more sculpting it more around what they wanted to hear and less about what I really thought so...

Sookie observed how she was writing what she thought was wanted even when she felt differently about a topic. Instead of developing the counter argument, Sookie fell into line and produced what she thought was the anticipated argument in an essay. Sookie experienced a 'loss' of voice as part of heeding to the 'centripetal forces' at play in writing. Shaped by 'what students believed would influence lecturers to give them a good mark' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271), Sookie's writing denoted not just what was said in the text but also 'erasure and silence at the point of production *as well* as at the point of reception' (Thesen 2014: 6).

Melanie explained how, on one occasion, writing guidance was so thorough, detailed and precise, that it almost felt as if the lecturer was dictating the exact essay they wanted.

Melanie felt that this was "pointless" because she felt she was getting instructed on writing an essay that the lecturer herself would have written. The example that Melanie offered, like Jade and Sookie's, resonated with Fulford's (2009) critique of writing frames in that the assessment guidance seemed to suggest to student writers that writing *was* a version of ventriloquation. Melanie said:

Melanie: It did depend on the lecturer because sometimes the lecturer wanted to....they would give an open ended question but he really wanted you to give an answer that he wanted, so you felt kind of constrained. Whereas some give you an opened ended question and really wanted you to let go and give them a debate and give them the kind of good literature that is there. That felt really good and really enjoyable, but it depends on the lecturer. Then we did have one where it was loads of guidance with it, basically telling us what she wanted...umm....and you just felt like you were kind of writing an essay that she was going to write but you know in that sense it was writing something for them so it was a bit pointless to get that essay done. And it also raised anxieties, people said, "oh, no it can't be this, it can't be this simple to do this, you have to do something else", but no, I said, I think she just wants these points and this and that is it.

According to Melanie, the precision of the instructions reduced writing to something where: "you just felt like you were kind of writing an essay that she was going to write". Melanie's words seemed to suggest that writing became meaningless. Student writers were left to jump through proverbial hoops and became stranded within the 'reproducing orientation' (Norton *et al* 2001: 274). The precision in the writing guidance provided to students also caused additional anxiety for the student group. Keen to do well in writing, according to Melanie, her peers were suspicious about the way the instructions almost 'spelt it out'. Furthermore, a 'right way' of writing is erroneously suggested to the students in ways

discussed by Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw (2000). By extension, writing guidance that appears to suggest right and wrong ways leaves little wriggle room– the precision in the guidelines are trapping not helpful.

6.5 Summary of chapter

Writing was sometimes talked about by the students as if it was something that equated to being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Certain 'centripetal forces' that shepherded writing were talked about in the form of staff preferences and assessment guidance. These types of centripetal forces sometimes became all-consuming leading to a loss of 'voice' and the adoption, to varying degrees, of ventriloquation. The accounts were considered as revealing how students may find themselves in what Norton *et al* (2001) refer to as a 'reproducing orientation' to writing as opposed to a 'meaning orientation'. From these accounts, it has been explored how 'voice' can 'tilt' towards 'the centre' in a way that is talked about by some students as a type of loss, necessity or sacrifice.

Chapter 7: The 'warm' and 'cold' risks of student writing

7.1 Introduction

So far, the 'tilting point' has been used to consider 'the individual act of putting words on paper' (Thesen 2014: 5). Chapter 5 discussed the possibilities and opportunities in writing, and how some students found ways to assert 'voice' into their writing. Chapter 6 explored the ways in which student writing resembled being stuck between a rock and a hard place, through the competing drives to do well in writing and to attain a sense of voice over one's own work. The final chapter broadens out the discussion on writing in relation to risk by exploring 'the range of emotions of lived academia' (Lillis 2014: 240) from an undergraduate student writer point of view. The interrelated writing risks that students talked about included issues around vagueness, staff variation and harsh markers. The students in my research talked about these risks in different ways. Some of the student views were commensurate with the Academic Literacies analyses of power in which predicaments in relation to writing were seen as involving 'the exercise of power' (Lea and Street 2000: 35). Other views and accounts seemed consistent with a consumer logic of how risk should be managed, minimised, and essentially treated as 'cold' risks. While other students articulated how these types of risks were an inevitable part of the human encounters involved in writing and in education (Biesta 2013), and a few students spoke of the benefits of these risks in ways indicating 'a more assertive, agency-focused approach' (Thesen 2014: 14) to writing. The final chapter explores how student responses to writing risks involving vagueness, staff variation and harsh marking were varied and did not adopt a blanket

consumer position. Instead student responses included ones that were sensitive to issues of power and nuanced in relation to discerning the differences between risks that could be calibrated and risks that were inevitable, and even at times beneficial.

7.2 Vagueness

Thesen (2013) and Thesen and Cooper's (2014) use of risk is specific to writing. Risk is talked about as something that shapes 'voice' and stimulates the differences between what gets written down and what gets edited out. Critical to this viewpoint is that there are ideas and thinking that simply never come to the fore and that writing is controlled by dominant gatekeepers. As such, the notion of a 'tilting point', as discussed in Chapter 6, was used to convey the ways that risk plays a part in what gets said and what gets silenced in writing. But the notion of risk can also help to further 'illuminate hidden dimensions of decision making, feeling and morality in relation to writing' (Thesen 2014: 10). These tacit aspects of writing are referred to more broadly as 'warm risks' (Thesen 2014: 12) and include the ways in which writing comes to be conceived of, and how we view and review writing encounters and experiences (Thesen and Cooper 2014).

Vagueness, meaning the clarity and explicitness of writing guidance, was a factor that some of the students I talked to saw as a type of 'warm' writing risk. Six of the students talked about vagueness in relation to the information they received about assignment tasks. For five of these students, the 'warm' risks relating to vagueness were articulated as involving 'the exercise of power' (Lea and Street 2000: 35), with students occupying relatively powerless positions when trying to ascertain clarity over assessment tasks. Students

Robbie, Sookie, Erin and Jimmy mentioned how the essay or assignment question was often not explained fully. Additionally, Letitia suggested that even after asking for clarification, advice and guidance over essay writing always seemed to remain vague. These views and accounts of writing show further the conflicting spaces that student writing occurs within – of wanting explicit instruction within an educational environment that pedestals independent learning.

But the risk of vagueness was not the same for everybody. In contrast to students who talked about the problematic nature of vagueness, Gayle supposed that vagueness could be advantageous to writers in the leeway it provided over what they could write, and how they could write it. The different perspective that Gayle offered intimates 'a more assertive, agency-focused approach' (Thesen 2014: 14) to writing with a stronger allegiance to the Edgework model that positions risk as something more useful and productive in writing. Therefore, feeling powerless in relation to the risk of vagueness was not something that was common to all students who mentioned it. I will start with an exploration of when vegueness was seen as a risk in more problematic terms.

Robbie has already been discussed in detail within chapters 5 and 6. His views of writing suggested that he found writing enjoyable on occasion, but that all the while, the need to achieve certain grades dominated the way he wrote and felt about writing. Robbie suggested to me that this could be "depressing" and therefore seemed to be something he had already reflected on, although only a first-year student. Some of what Robbie expressed in relation to vagueness revealed how a type of 'warm' risk sometimes tainted writing for him. He saw his feeling of worry as something that "lingers" when he is writing. He replied:

I: And are those concerns, is that something that bugs you at the time when you are writing, does it linger? Or is it more of a fleeting worry?

Robbie: It lingers, definitely. Like there will be times when I'm writing something and I'll wonder if it is relevant to what I'm doing because I haven't fully understood the question, it hasn't been fully explained.

In this section, Robbie talked about his position as a writer in powerless terms. He spoke of how the question was not always understood because it hadn't been "fully explained". His words sound consumerist and passive on one level, but they also suggest how he felt at the mercy of others – waiting to be instructed and told what to do. The Academic Literacies framework highlight how writing is imbued with power because academic staff hold the monopoly over what counts as acceptable ways of writing: something that Robbie grapples with as he is left to "wonder" the relevance of "what I'm doing". Untangling the conventions of writing for students requires an ability to make the implicit explicit (Lea 2004); something that Robbie feels hasn't happened because "it hasn't been fully explained".

Sookie has also already been discussed, and while acknowledging some opportunities and possibilities in writing, Sookie mainly took the tack that writing was rigid and often required a kind of loss of voice. As well, in her interview, Sookie mentioned how she felt that writing guidance was often kept vague. She asserted that what lecturers wanted, in the form of "desired outcomes", was something that was "never really that clear". The pervasiveness of

vagueness appeared to be expressed in similar ways to Robbie - by Sookie - as something that "lingers". Sookie said:

Sookie: You just get one of those sheets like the desired outcomes one again and it would just be a few boxes of ....it was never really that clear, no. No, I didn't enjoy that.

Sookie and Robbie can be seen as revealing a further 'rock and hard place' within their accounts. Both talked to me about the restrictive nature of writing guidance and individual preferences and both suggested that restrictive rules around assignments could negatively limit what they could write. At the same time, the risk of vagueness was a difficulty that they struggled with. In other words, Sookie and Robbie came across an impasse in writing in the way they both resisted and embraced precise writing guidance. As previously discussed, both suggested restrictive guidance was a stranglehold that determined too rigidly what they should write. Sookie and Robbie recognized how their writing endeavours resembled 'prescriptivism' (Ivanic 1998: 11) and were subjected to 'conformative assessment procedures' (Torrance 2012: 324). But at the same time, both were drawn to writing guidance that provided insights that helped with knowing what to write based on a desire to remove the unpleasant and troublesome nature of writing (Fulford 2009; French 2018). As Robbie suggested "it lingers" and as Sookie put it: "I didn't enjoy that".

In another part of the interview, Sookie suggested that it would be helpful if students could be given "a clear break down of things you should include if you are going to reach a set level". There are a couple of interesting points to raise in relation to this particular extract. Firstly, Sookie is specific that detail is needed to reveal to students what should be included

in their writing to attain the higher-grade boundaries – i.e. "what would push you over to get this" and "what extra stuff". Secondly, Sookie actively seeks out information that will limit her own 'voice' in order to decide 'what will go into texts, and what styles and languages are chosen' (Thesen 2014: 3). Therefore, Sookie seeks to use the 'tilting point' to inform her writing in ways that privilege the 'other' over the 'self.' However, Sookie also argues herself into an untenable position as she comes to recognise that guidance cannot "completely spell it out" but all the while calls for "a proper break down" and "what you need to include". In other words, Sookie articulated the contradictory tensions in Higher Education for student writers quite aptly. On the one hand, there may be a propensity for student writers to seek out clear, detailed and specific instructions in order to make the achievement of certain grades more likely. But on the other hand, students may also recognise that specific instruction does not square neatly with the ethos of Higher Education learning. Sookie deliberated below:

I: Okay, so in those instances what information would have helped you to understand the mark?

Sookie: I think it would have been better if we had had a clear break down of what kind of things you should include if you are only going to reach a set level, what other things...you know...what would push you over to get this, then what extra things...that kind of stuff, proper breakdown of grades and what people put in what instance to get those sort of things, what you need to include, not necessarily to completely spell it out for us but why other people have reached a set grade and you haven't, that kind of stuff....so I would see a clear break down of all the things I should include or mention.

Thesen (2014) outlines what the postgraduate condition entails for postgraduate writers. She suggests it is 'a predicament, a pervasive state in which one lives with contradictions

over time' (Thesen 2014: 7). Thesen lists the contradictions inherent in the postgraduate condition as 'original yet scholarly; makers of new knowledge yet slaves to the old; anglicised yet not English; creative yet held by generic conventions; independent yet in need of supervision; assertive yet humble' (Thesen 2014: 7). The rock and the hard place can be likened to what might be considered as *the undergraduate condition*. In Sookie's case, she is torn between wanting instruction but knowing that full instruction for writing would be to "spell it out". Sookie's statement succinctly suggests how undergraduate student writers may face their own 'contradictions over time' (Thesen 2014: 7). The struggle for undergraduate writers in these types of cases is nestled between needing specific writing instruction on the one hand and understanding the requirement for independent learning on the other. This tension captures how the consumer logic of education promotes Higher Education as a safe investment but belies the traditional virtues of 'the educational way' (Biesta 2013: 3) that is: 'the slow way, the difficult way, the frustrating way' (Biesta 2013: 3). To put it another way, the *undergraduate condition* involves a conflict of ideas around the role of Higher Education generally, and the nature of writing specifically.

The conflict between independent learning and seeking explicit guidance *if not instruction* was further subsumed within the accounts provided by Erin, Jimmy and Letitia. In these cases, a strain was cast upon student and staff relationship in varying ways. For Erin, staff were responsible but aloof. For Jimmy, staff held powerful positions but acted in ways that were trivial. And for Letitia, staff required specifics but advised generically. These conflicts expressed by the students I talked to constitute another aspect of the undergraduate

condition: staff are both a help and a hindrance; they are mentors who can aid and gatekeepers who can block.

Erin has so far been discussed across each chapter. Her failed year two was often mentioned in the interview and seemed to add to a sense of 'risk alertness' in the way Erin talked about writing. At one point in the interview, Erin stated that: "our lecturers are very vague". The view that Erin seemingly took at this time was again commensurate with the Academic Literacies framework (Lea and Street 1998) within which writing experiences are bound by issues of power that play out as part of the social context of writing. But in particular, Erin talked about a discrete example to think through how a sense of 'warm' risk developed out of vague information from her lecturers. Erin recounted how there was some confusion across the cohort about the course content. Erin recalled that they had one or two-hour lectures on difficult topic areas and that afterwards, students were left to their own devices. Erin suggested that there was a type of academic privilege at play in the way that academic staff might decide the extent to which they would provide guidance for assessment writing. In doing so, Erin suggested that the power held by academic staff could be used in ways that contributed to the 'warm risks' of writing for student writers. In her own words, Erin said:

I: Is there any discussions around the guidance you have been given from the lecturer?

Erin: Yes...umm....sometimes....well actually, because our lectures are very vague, we have one lecture on a specific theory or 2 hours on a specific theory and then we are sort of left to go off on our own with it. I have had discussions with people in the past to say well, what is your understanding of this? Sometimes we don't fully understand what even....like one of them was managerialism in social work and we didn't

have a clue what that even meant so we would talk about, so what is "managerialism" and how we

viewed it to see if it was the same.

The Academic Literacies model prompts academic communities to foresee how student learning 'often involves contestation and challenge as students interweave prior knowledge and ways of writing and reading texts with course requirements' (McMillan 2000: 153). Erin's feelings suggested how this type of sentiment was felt by herself and her peers. Erin concluded in this particular extract that one lecture is not enough and that information was left vague to the impediment of students. Erin suggested how she left the lecture feeling as if "we didn't have a clue".

In another example related to the risk of vagueness, Jimmy talked about a specific assignment task that he found to be very subjective in terms of its requirements. Jimmy, as introduced in previous chapters, was a first-year medicine student. Jimmy saw possibilities and opportunities in writing, but also saw times when he needed to write in ways for the sake of grades. Jimmy suggested that he did not like to be grade driven, but that at the same time, it was sometimes a necessity for getting through the module or writing task. In relation to vagueness, Jimmy recounted a subjective assessment that required students to reflect upon teamwork. The subjective nature of the writing task, which was a reflective piece, presented a particular difficulty for Jimmy. The scenario that Jimmy faced represents a specific 'warm risk' in relation to reflective writing. Whereas the personal nature of reflective writing has been the prime contestation in recent research connected to reflective writing (*see* Marsh 2014; Tomkins and Nicholds 2017; Rai 2011), Jimmy asserted how reflective writing was problematic because it was overly subjective. He said:

Jimmy: Usually if we're given a set piece of work we're given some specific guidance. Sometimes not so specific which is slightly annoying, I had a piece last week and it was a reflective assignment so it was on your personal experiences. It was a very personal thing but they're telling you to write about a specific aspect of your course and have a personal reflection on that and I think the two are quite contradictory because it's very hard to make someone write something on an aspect of the course and make it personal because they might not have anything good to say about it, if that makes sense. So I was trying to write something, it was on my reflections of group work, and I had to write 1,000 words on it. It really annoyed me, well not annoyed me, but I found it really hard because I didn't have a lot to say about that and I could think of loads of other things that I'd much rather reflect on and write a thing on. The guidance was so vague and the marking was so vague, not that marking's the only, sort of the main thing in it, but as I said I like to write a good piece of work, I don't like doing a shoddy piece of work, that was quite frustrating.

Jimmy's gripe appeared to be that both the guidance and the way it was going to be marked was 'vague'. Therefore, 'the tilting point of risk' (Thesen 2014: 20) was something that became quite fuzzy. The fuzziness of knowing what to write makes it more difficult to make decisions over 'which representations will prevail and which meanings will be invested' (Thesen 2014: 15). To put it another way, vagueness makes it difficult to know what to say and what to silence in writing. Jimmy continued to grapple with the notion of vagueness:

Jimmy: I think sometimes they're deliberately vague, like this reflective thing I had last week, I think was deliberately vague which was annoying really because it's all very well and fun but if you fail it, it's just a pain. So maybe that's just me being cynical, but sometimes there are unanswered questions.

As Jimmy continued to think through the nature of the task he was asked to do, he suggested that the vagueness connected to the assignments was deliberate. Jimmy suggested that this may be a "cynical" take but that he considered it nevertheless. Vagueness, as a deliberate act suggests that students and lecturers are being seen as opposed to each other; that somehow, they are on different 'sides'. The view that Jimmy expressed is similar to the views exhorted by the Academic Literacies tradition: the lecturer is always in a position 'superior' to their students (Ivanic, Clark and Rimmershaw 2000: 60). Jimmy intimated a type of power play when he put it: "it's all very well and fun but if you fail it, it's just a pain". These words convey how Jimmy saw those with power as being able to use vagueness frivolously. He hinted at how failing would be a "pain" and therefore suggested that this type of vagueness was not an out-an-out risk but rather, a kind of nuisance. The risk of vagueness, therefore, is problematic to varying degrees for different individual student writers.

Letitia was a student studying within the Faculty of Health and at the time of the interview, she had just graduated. Letitia enjoyed reading and research but found writing quite onerous. Letitia felt that inconsistencies around feedback and marking were prominent issues on her course. Letitia also talked frequently about vagueness in assessment tasks as something that often impeded upon writing negatively. Letitia suggested that baseline information was provided but that it was "vague" and that as a group (i.e. the course cohort), they would "always" have to "dig deeper and ask more questions about what was expected of us". She said:

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Letitia: We did have a framework which we had to...we did see how, like the points system, you do get marked 5% for the introduction, 10% for the conclusion or whatever. It was like a framework where you could see where we were being marked and we were given like a brief at the start of every module which would include things like the assignment expectations but it was quite vague in some ways which is why we had to keep going back to seek advice from tutors if we needed to

The matter of 'vagueness' was further discussed:

Letitia: We would always have to dig deeper and ask more questions about what was expected of us

Student inclination to do away with vagueness and to ascertain a 'perfect match between "input" and "output"' (Biesta 2013: 1) contributes to some of the tensions within *the undergraduate condition* for student writers. The employability narratives of Higher Education actively urge students to 'seek a degree 'product' rather than a learning experience' (Williams 2013: 86). The struggle between learning and attainment can be acutely felt in writing if students have been encouraged to invest in a University Education on the basis that it is 'safe' and 'prudent' to do so. Vague guidance around assignments that contribute to final classifications disturbs the notion of Higher Education as a 'safe' and 'prudent' investment. Letitia uttered how "we would always have to dig deeper and ask more questions". Letitia spoke of the need "to dig deeper" in order to try and reduce vagueness and the risk it posed in terms of potentially jeopardising student ability to do well.

However, whilst many students disliked what they perceived to be as vague guidance, this view was not held consistently across all students I interviewed. Gayle suggested how vague

guidance was helpful in the sense that it did not require specific answers and provided her with welcomed leeway in her writing endeavours. Gayle did hold some cynicism in her views. She suspected that there was an 'implicit hybrid approach' (Yorke, Bridges and Woolf 2000: 21) in the way writing was graded and she talked metaphorically about the "bullet points" that she needed to decode and include in her writing as a result. But Gayle, as seen before, was a confident writer and a year two Physics and Business Management student. Gayle saw writing as a game but one that she understood and one she could work with. Vague guidance was thus seen by Gayle as offering a type of flexibility that aided her writing in ways that tallied with Thesen's (2014) notion of 'Edge pedagogy'. Sourced from Lyng's (2008) edgework perspective, Thesen (2014) suggests that risk can be positively productive in and for writing. For Gayle, vagueness was not perceived as a 'warm risk' that caused harm or difficulties for her writing. Instead, from Gayle's perspective, vagueness delivered more room for 'spontaneity, flow and play' (Thesen 2013 16). Gayle observed:

I: Okay. What do you think about documents like that cover learning outcomes and assessment criteria? Are they useful documents or can they be a hindrance?

Gayle: They're helpful in terms of to see what you expected, that's talking about that little bullet point that they have but they say they don't. That's just them showing that they do have some criteria, not the bullet points, not the topics that we need cover, but like some sort of feel to the essay. So it needs to be smooth and it needs to be evaluated and that's good. After you've read your essay, like the proof read, it's on this sheet and you can sort of like see where your marks is gonna be on. So I do like it and it doesn't have any guidance...well it does but it just gives you the feel of what's expected. It doesn't give you specifics like boom, boom, boom and you do this, this, this and this. So I quite like it.

While Robbie, Sookie, Erin, Jimmy and Letitia cited vagueness as something that was problematic, Gayle suggested that vagueness equated to "the feel of what's expected" in ways that could be used to her advantage. The way that Gayle talked about vagueness as a benefit to student writers suggested ' a more assertive, agency focused approach' (Thesen 2014: 14) to writing. Gayle's views expressed in this extract suggests how she felt competent and able to use writing guidance to achieve 'success and progression' (Lea and Street 1998: 158) in her writing as opposed to desiring specific writing instruction. Gayle talked in ways that suggested she had confidence to rely on assets of 'ability and effort' because they are her own 'properties' (Weiner 1974: 5) – rather than as problems beyond the scope of her control. If it is taken that 'the agency lies less in the theory than in the awareness that one is working through an epistemological paradox' (Thesen 2014: 15) then Gayle is a useful point in case. Vagueness is not insufficient but liberating: it offers some free-range for student writers to work with.

7.3 Variation in staff guidance and approachability

Alongside vagueness, many of the students I talked to considered the enigma of staff variation in terms of guidance and approachability to be a changing and shifting aspect of writing. The need to weigh-up what some people wanted and how they wanted it, as well as who might be okay to approach, are further examples of 'warm' risks connected to student writing. For some of the students who talked about staff variation, these types of risks share similarities to the Academic Literacies view of 'course switching' within which students must adjust and readjust writing approaches based on what writing task they are doing and who they are doing it for. However, some students talked about staff variation in

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different ways. In these cases, staff variation was understood as part of the humanness of education (Biesta 2013) and discussed as something that was inevitable and to be accepted. These views were so bar one particular case, that saw staff variation as inevitable but also as pliable.

The first example is from the interview I had with Jade. Jade talked about how she had received contradictory feedback after she applied feedback from one essay to another. The experience that Jade shared with me neatly echoes what Lea and Street (1998) refer to as 'course switching'. The practice of 'course switching' (Lea and Street 2000: 45) is understood as students being required to amend their writing depending on what they are writing and who for. An important aspect of 'course switching' according to the Academic Literacies view is what it reveals: *i.e.* 'what counts as 'good writing' is therefore partly a matter of the individual preferences of teaching staff, or the individual interpretation by teaching staff of the ostensibly 'given' rules of good writing.' (Lea and Stierer 2000: 4). Jade, who has previously been discussed as someone who viewed writing as constituting certain losses and restrictions, told me:

Jade: Sometimes I have got essays back from lecturers previously and then those comments I take with me to the next essay and then I am then like, go the other way. So if they say you have repeated this too much, then the next time I will think well I will only mention this once, I won't do that again and then they have gone...well you have barely spoke about that and.....it is difficult as every lecturer is different so you get different feedback and then you take that onto your next essay but you might have a different lecturer for that and they feel differently

Being alert to disciplinary differences, assessment-type differences and individual staff differences, is seen by Lea and Street (1998) as an outcome of the power imbalances within the academy. The 'statusful community' (Ivanic 1997: 83) dictates what is acceptable in relation to disciplinary conventions, institutional practices and goes as far as involving individual expectations and preferences. Students, on the other hand, must figure out these tacit writing rules and produce writing that adheres to shifting and localized conventions. Based on what was said by the students I talked to, individual preferences, in particular, were cited as the bane of course switching. I turn to Jade's case again:

Jade: Some people really like you to voice your opinions, for example, some people don't, some people want you to say, "I think......" in an essay and some people say, I don't care what you think like, that is not what this module is about, you are supposed to be researching what...."I think" just doesn't work, you can't just write at the end and make up some words like..."to conclude, I think....". Whereas some people are like, yes, that is great, put in your opinion and.....some people like this and it really varies.

Course switching in response to the way different members of staff advise student writers on how to write make the tilting point more difficult to read. When guidance varies from one person to the next, decisions made about writing are trickier to call. The multiple steers on writing from staff contributes to the opacity of writing tasks. In Jade's case, course switching at the level of individual preferences requires working out who to listen to and take advice from, and when to make this call.

A similar situation was revealed in the interview I had with Norma. Norma was a second-year student of Psychology. Norma felt comfortable with writing across genres and enjoyed

the variation this offered her. The main issues she raised about writing were to do with grammar and accessing help for her writing when she needed it. But she also talked about how she often felt "stuck in the middle" when receiving advice and guidance on writing from different people. Norma reflected on how "I don't actually know which one is right". As she put it:

Norma: Umm no. Some staff can tell you one thing and some staff can tell you another thing. And you're literally stuck in the middle. And like I've gone to teaching fellows and they've told me something different and I'm like, well, who do I actually listen to? But yeah, it can just be really different I find.

I: So how does that make you feel when you get those differences? How do you manage it?

Norma: It's quite stressful. Because I'm getting all of this information and I don't actually know which one is right.

Although the Academic Literacies model talks about the power differentials between staff and students, it is perhaps less clear on the multifaceted interactions that students have with various other people. But increasingly, students are more likely to have conversations about writing with other people as student support services and mechanisms grow (Barr 2011; Whitchurch 2008). The many different voices giving writing advice to Norma led her to be unable to detangle what to do in writing. Norma's indecision about how she might manage competing writing advice is perhaps complicated by the implicit suggestion that she sees writing as a right or wrong endeavour. A right or wrong view of writing curbs student likeliness to write in ways that indulge 'the sticky moments' (Chicota and Thesen 2014: 146) such as getting towards an idea or having interesting insights that are perhaps occasionally

flawed. Feelings of right and wrongs in relation to writing also makes dealing with varying guidance difficult to synthesise. For Norma, this is "stressful" and prompts her to think "who do I actually listen to?".

Staff variation consisted not only of who to take advice from in terms of applying advice, but also in terms of who to approach in the first place. Belinda, not yet discussed, was a second-year student studying Psychology and Criminology and was part of my pilot study research. Belinda was a competent writer who reported to me the high grades she was achieving in her written work. Belinda saw how some staff were supportive and willing to help, and yet others seemed dismissive and too busy to help. In her words:

Belinda: And sometimes you get the feeling off tutors that you can either come to them with a piece of work, or with, urm, with like an essay plan. And they're like, they normally do say "oh, like, I'm really happy for you to come and do that." And with other people, you're, like, a bit, like, nervous. Like, are they just going to be thinking, 'oh I don't have time for this?'

Erin, Robbie and Sookie pointed out similar inconsistencies in terms of *staff approachability and helpfulness*. Erin and Robbie reported individual differences in staff helpfulness with some members of staff seemingly more prepared to help than others. Sookie, similarly, talked about having different lecturers with some being "amazing" and others "awful". I have taken examples from the three interviews together below:

Robbie: it can really vary between the tutor and that doesn't help at all.

Erin: I think some lecturers are more willing to give you support than others are and a bit more empathetic if you do fail things.

Sookie: I think some lecturers were a lot more helpful than others....umm....I definitely found that. In History I think I had three different lecturers and two of them were amazing and one of them was awful.

These views reveal how 'course switching', as part of students' Academic Literacies, extend beyond working out the individual preferences of lecturers to include variance over staff *approachability*. It is furthermore observable across the views offered by Belinda, Robbie, Erin, Sookie, Norma and Jade that staff variation (above other types of variation such as genre, institutional conventions and disciplinary differences), presented the most difficulties in terms of 'course switching'. In other words, 'course switching' was reported as problematic mainly in relation to staff variation (and not to disciplinary differences, genres or assessment diversity).

But like vagueness, the risks and difficulties connected to staff variation were not viewed entirely consistently across the students who talked about it. By contrast, students Gayle and Melanie appeared to reconcile staff variation as something that was inevitable. Gayle suggested that marking was broadly the same across staff but that different lecturers will "look for different things" and that this is "understandable" due to "different personalities". Therefore, variation was talked about as appropriate for education which depends upon 'an encounter between human beings' (Biesta 2013: 1). Within this view, differences across individual opinion within Higher Education were deemed as both expected and appropriate. Gayle intimated that variation across individual members of staff was

defendable because: "for different personalities you'd have different writing". Gayle mused:

Gayle: In terms of marking, they'll mark pretty much the same but they do look for different things 'cause they're different people and it's understandable 'cause for different personalities you'd have different writing. So they would expect it from writing from us students as well.

In another example, Melanie also highlighted the human aspect of education. Melanie, as discussed previously, was someone who did feel that there were times that she had agency in writing, but that at other times increasingly restrictive types of writing guidance erased her scope for it. In response to variations in staff approachability, Melanie talked about how some staff were nice, and others were strict but, how ultimately, "human judgement can vary". Melanie's views can be understood as being empathetic towards variation and therefore, accepting that dealing with people was inherently varied - rather than seeing variation as a risk relating specifically to writing for assessment. She said:

Melanie: There were ones which were stricter and ones which were kind of nicer; ones that were too nice and ones that were rude. You know, that middle balance would have been....it is difficult though isn't it because human judgement can vary.

In a competitive world that locates education into performative regimes (Dann 2015), both Gayle and Melanie suggested the 'warm risks' around staff variation were part of "different personalities" and the inevitability of difference within "human judgement". Their accounts suggest a resistance to the idea that education should be freed from risk and made void of the more 'sticky moments' in writing (Chihota and Thesen 2014:

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146). Whereas some students (Jade, Norma, Belinda, Robbie, Erin and Sookie) talked about the urge to iron out uncertainty, both Gayle and Melanie intimated a degree of acceptance for the inevitability of this type of warm risk in writing. The position Gayle and Melanie put forward thus resonates with how: 'the risk is there because students are not to be seen as objects to be molded and disciplined, but as subjects of action and responsibility' (Biesta 2013: 1). Gayle and Melanie do not aspire to do away with the risk of human differences.

In a final example of staff variability, I refer to Lydia. Lydia was a third year Biochemistry and Biology student. Lydia has been discussed so far in relation to Fromm's 'Being' mode. Lydia took great delight and satisfaction from writing and spoke of her commitment to her discipline. Lydia did not have much to say about the more restrictive aspects of writing, and tended to speak more of how writing opened up possibilities and opportunities. Lydia did talk about staff variation however and to some extent - although Lydia did so in ways that were different from the other students discussed so far. Specifically, Lydia focused on the ways to *manage* staff variability. By way of an example, Lydia talked about making choices between the dissertation subject and dissertation supervisor. She saw the decision as a type of trade-off between either doing some research on a topic you are interested in, or doing a dissertation with a supervisor who you think you are going to work well with. For context, Lydia talked about this in the following way:

Lydia: I actually do feel like I wish I'd picked a different supervisor. Like my topics they're interesting and stuff but I think I would compromise and would have picked a different supervisor.

I: So do you pick your supervisor or is your supervisor based on your area of study?

Lydia: So you get lists of the options topics, topic options; you get a list and you read through it. It tells you who the supervisor is but it's up to you how you pick. Some people will literally look through the topics and pick based on what they've found interesting, some people pick based on the supervisor like or I want this supervisor so let me see what topics he has.

I: Right okay yes, and so did you do it by the subject?

Lydia: Yes I did.

I: And if you could rewind time?

Lydia: I wouldn't.

I: Would you do it by the tutor?

Lydia: Yes.

I: Really.

Lydia: 100%.

In some ways, Lydia's thinking can be discerned as something equating to Norton *et al*'s (2001) paper on essay-writing tactics. Lydia was absolute that if she had her time again she would choose the supervisor over the topic area. Lydia appeared to indicate that it was easier to do well and cope with a topic that may not align with your own

academic interests than to be matched with the wrong supervisor. Lydia suggested that the relationship between supervisor and student was more critical in doing well than it was about choosing the research topic. The retrospective insights that Lydia shared with me suggested how she may have come to grips with some of the 'rules of the game' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271) more latterly in her studies. Norton *et al* (2001: 272) concluded that 'assessment is a powerful influence which does not always encourage students to take the desired deep approach but may actually do the opposite'. Here, we see a capable student with a strong sense of disciplinary identity, who, at the cusp of choosing what type of dissertation to do, feels that it is probably best to strategise. Lydia's case reminds us of the difficult situation that student writing occurs in – between the rock and a hard place - in a high stakes, high fee regime where assessment is king.

7.4 Harsh markers

If assessment is king then the treatment of assessment is likely to be high on the agenda for undergraduate student writers. Issues over inconsistent marking and the prospect of having the 'wrong' person mark your work was a notable issue in relation to doing well in writing. Students perceived that some members of academic staff were particularly "harsh" in their marking. Thus, 'who' marked work represented a particular risk for some of the student writers I talked to. At times, the way students talked about harsh markers continued to chime with the Academic Literacies view on how 'relatively powerless writers are positioned by readers who are their assessors' (Ivanic 1997: 98). However, the risk of the 'harsh marker' was often spoken about by students in ways that conferred it as more of a 'cold

risk' – a risk that is identifiable and subjectable to control and eradication. And yet, the perception of 'harsh markers' as a 'cold' writing risk also sat in contrast to one particular view that involved seeing education, (and therefore marking), as more of 'an encounter between human beings' (Biesta 2013: 1). The final section of this chapter explores these different views in order to convey the lean towards a 'cold' risk in relation to the specific risk of 'harsh markers'.

I will start with a recap over the differences between what Thesen refers to as 'cold' and 'warm' risks as they relate to Higher Education. Firstly, the notion of 'warm risk' heralded by Thesen (2014) can be understood from its contrast to McWilliam's (2009) use of 'cold risk'. To summarise quickly, McWilliam asserts how Higher Education is increasingly convened in ways that manage and control risk as part of making claims over performance, achievement and quality. HEIs are increasingly seen as places of 'risk-consciousness' (McWilliam 2009: 189), and a manifestation of performative working cultures that seek to minimize, if not eradicate, risk. What happens, McWilliam (2009: 192) suggests, is that HE management pay attention to 'what can go wrong' by targeting risks that are 'visible and calculable' (*ibid* 2009: 189). Thesen sums it up as 'a climate of risk management' wherein 'universities seek to manage the dangers that may befall them in building their reputations' (2014: 11). The application of 'cold risk' is therefore levied, in the first instance, at the management and infrastructures of Higher Education in a consumer-bound, risk-alert system.

Thesen has subsequently applied the notion of 'cold risk' to think about writing. In particular, issues to do with plagiarism and ethics are common examples of 'cold' risks bound to the practice of writing within the academy. It should be noted in brief that neither

Thesen nor McWilliam suggest that matters to do with plagiarism or ethics should be left unmonitored or unaddressed. Rather, these examples are discussed as a useful starting point to discern the differences between calculable and containable writing risks (that are 'cold') versus tacit and hidden writing risks (that are 'warm'). In doing so, Thesen outlines the ways in which the academy is mindful and alert to risks in ways that find expression in an inclination to control risks. In the following section of this chapter, I explore the ways in which certain student writers also expressed similar inclinations to control risks in relation to the singling out of "harsh markers" as an identifiable 'cold' writing risk.

It might be useful to usher in an aside at this point. The issues to do with harsh marking are not being discussed in order to ascertain whether harsh marking exists, or whether it is fair in the case that it does. The issue of 'harsh marking' is more of a symbolic debate that cuts into how the role of education is being understood by students currently studying within it. Thesen (2014: 3) talks about 'risk' as 'an inevitable part of knowledge making'. In a similar tone, Biesta (2013: 1) refers to the ways in which education requires an element of risk because students are: 'subjects of action and responsibility' (Biesta 2013: 1). Having one's writing judged and marked is one risk connected to education for anyone entering Higher Education, and like many risks, it can 'feel' uncomfortable. For students in a consumer-led system, the uncomfortable nature of risk might start to jar with the idea that you are accessing something that you have paid for. The disjuncture between paying for something that feels unpleasant, stressful and unfair is a clear ill-fit for student satisfaction. The risks of "harsh markers" are not complemented well by the consumer-led system that students find themselves in, and therefore, are out of kilter when encountered. This section explores student responses to feeling out-of-kilter in relation to "harsh marking".

A few of the student cases discussed so far veer slightly towards what might be viewed as 'cold risks'. Sookie wanted a "clear break down" to fend off the risk of vagueness. And Belinda and Lydia offered up solutions to hamper the warm risks of staff variation such as peer review and selecting the supervisor before the topic in dissertation work. But all of these instances fall short of Thesen and McWilliam's use of 'cold' risk. Sookie's position was torn because she understood that guidance could not "spell it out" and therefore was not a fully-fledged inclination to stamp out risk. In relation to Belinda and Lydia, they both offered solutions that were inward-looking and not focused on how the academy should 'manage, calibrate and fix risk' (Thesen 2014: 12). But in the case of the "harsh marker", students were more likely to see it as a 'cold' risk that the academy should 'sort' - sometimes offering tangible solutions around what the academy might do to rid Higher Education from it. To explicate these instances, I will explore four student cases consisting of Erin, Letitia, Marley and Ivy. The section will close with a final consideration of views put forward by Lydia, who also spoke of "harsh markers" but did so on very different terms. Lydia did not speak in cold risk terms but instead referred to the educational benefits that might lurk within "harsh marking".

I start with Erin who we have heard from already in this chapter and as part of the other data analysis chapters. Erin laboured over the issue of 'harsh markers' during her interview with me. She felt that 'harsh markers' had something to do with her failed second year. She talked about how the markers changed from year one to year two and how the "harsh markers" were renowned on the course. She had also received warnings about 'harsh markers' from other students in higher years. Erin said:

Erin: we had different markers from first year to second year so I think that was a massive reason why some essays were fine and others I failed so...different lecturers came in and marked it. We even got told by people in the year above us, oh they are a harsh marker, wait till you get marked by them. So, yes, I think it is really different.

Erin talked about how knowing who was going to mark her work impacted on the way she approached writing. Erin's view therefore revealed how she saw marking practices as variable in ways that tally to previous research around assessment and grading (*see* Read, Francis and Robson 2005; Norton 2009; O'Hagan and Wiggleswortn 2015). She felt that a "harsh marker" created a lot of stress in the way she worked as a writer. The stress that Erin talked about can be considered as a 'warm risk'; the strain on Erin's day-to-day that locates the risk at the level of the experiential. But as a result of pervasive feelings of worry, Erin suggested how she valued the double-marking that was imposed on the final year project. She saw double-marking as a type of safety net to safeguard against unnecessarily "harsh marking". Here, Erin takes what is the 'warm risk' of harsh markers (the strain and stress of the 'what if'), and relocates the matter as a 'cold risk' (how it should be handled and what can be done to manage it). The double marking of work becomes a control measure to help reduce or rid the risk that is encountered when staff mark work. Erin said:

Erin: I think it varies from tutor to tutor. That is half the problem. That is why I like two different tutors marking the project. People who have one marker say, oh she is alright and another one will say, oh no, they are not....I wish I had the other one. I think even with something you can be a bit more creative, you are still stressed if someone is marking it who you think is a harsh marker.

Some students may doubt the fairness of marking (Fletcher *et al* 2012). Erin articulated variability in marking as "half the problem". But the practice of double marking reassures Erin that student work can be treated with more consistency. In this example, Weiner's (1986) attribution theory comes to mind because Erin sees how something that was 'uncontrollable' (harsh markers) can become controlled (via double-marking practices). The risk is 'cold' if it can be 'fixed'.

In a similar vein, Letitia talked about the ways in which there were renowned "harsh markers" on her course. She talked about this as a "known fact" amongst the other students she studied alongside. Letitia recounted:

Letitia: we had about 28 in our group.....so the group was split between what lectures would mark it for the same piece so you would get one person who would mark it...well everyone would have different markers basically and that was unfair because well it was a known fact that some lecturers were hard markers than others, so that was another thing as well which we brought up a lot.

She continued:

Letitia: I felt that I had put a lot of work into it and a lot of research in and I didn't get the grade It thought I deserved and it was one of the markers who were a bit harsher, which is frustrating when a lot of people get someone who freely marks, more casually like and doesn't fully scrutinise the piece of work like the other markers do. Unfortunately like my piece of work. I think that, again not consistent, but a similar issue where markers are not consistent and that was not resolved.

Letitia claimed how "everyone would have different markers" and that this was "unfair" because some markers marked more harshly than others. Letitia attributed inconsistent marking to some of her lower grades. She described how some staff marked casually and some more harshly and suggested that some were freer with marks than others. In this sort of situation, the lottery of harsh markers can be seen as a 'warm risk' in the way it is bound to the experiential domain. However, Letitia discussed what might be done, and therefore the discussion moved to think about harsh marking as something that needed to be dealt with or 'fixed'. She suggested:

Letitia: I think just, like personally for us, to get...like the same lecturer marked every work rather than having.....because it is unfair....it is well known that some lecturers are harsh markers compared to others and if you know you are going to get the harsh marker, it is not fair if you are comparing marks with other people who have got different markers.

On the one hand, the introduction of tuition fees locates students as consumers in Higher Education (Williams 2013). In any situation within which consumers pay to access services they would want the same level of 'service' that other fee-paying customers receive. And yet on the other hand, education is not just any other consumer good or service (Walford 2001). Education involves 'an encounter between human beings' (Biesta 2013: 1) and one that is 'slow', 'difficult' and 'frustrating' (Biesta 2013: 3) – in other words, it is set apart from a consumer logic that strives for satisfaction. Illustrating dissatisfaction, Letitia expressed how there might be some sort of internal fix that could be applied to thwart harsh marking. Her suggestions attempt to 'manage, calibrate and fix risk' (Thesen 2014: 12) in order to 'make education strong, secure, predictable and risk-free' (Biesta 2013: 3). Letitia suggested

a solution of having one marker per module to ensure consistency. Letitia, like Erin, suggested ways to mitigate the risk of the 'harsh marker' by introducing techniques for uniformity.

Marley was first introduced in order to discuss how she saw opportunities and possibilities in writing. Therefore, Marley conveyed a sense of voice in writing and felt less restricted by guidance and individual preferences compared to other students I spoke to. However, Marley felt strongly about the issue of harsh marking. In Marley's case, variance over marking with some marking more robustly than others, was highlighted as the main concern for her in relation to writing. Marley felt a synergy with the disciplines she was studying. She saw differences in positions of power between staff and students but recognised these as legitimate in the way they tended to reflect people's expertise and authority in research. But Marley was much more cynical over the issue of marking. She said:

Marley: I know that people have had some bad experiences with (.....), I would like to see it more consistent, erm consistent when it comes to marking and consistent when it comes to feedback, because I know that (…) one of the departments that my joint honours is for, there is, people will be get conflicting erm advice. So they will say you haven't supported your argument enough and then on the other hand it will say you haven't looked at all, you know, all the different arguments for that.

Marley continued to stress the importance of the issue when she went on to say the following:

Marley: So I know that's a huge problem. I don't know if the tutors don't talk to each other or if they've got their own ideas, but I'd like the support to be the same, to be the same to everyone and applied to everyone, and that just being in all areas of the assessment, because that is something people really struggle with.

And what that's resulted in is marks for a paper being, depending on who's marking, can range from 50 to a first. That is a serious problem. So that is something that needs to be looked at, I would say, quite urgently.

Marley's words suggested her strength of feeling. Harsh marking was seen as "a serious problem". It should be looked at "urgently". These inconsistencies, according to Marley, are found in both in the marking and feedback practices of staff. For Marley, these types of inconsistencies were seen as unacceptable and ways to stamp them out should be found. Her words resonated with the way McWilliam's (2009: 189) described HEIs as 'risk aware' in a bid to demonstrate 'efficient and effective higher education organisation'. Marley talked about marking inconsistencies as types of 'cold risks' that were not an inherent part of writing, but something else that could be reduced, limited and removed with the right kind of strategy in place.

Ivy talked about an instance when a whole cohort of students felt that their work had been marked too harshly, or they had been set the wrong question, or possibly even taught badly. Ivy's example evokes a consumer logic similar to what Williams (2013) and Molesworth *et al* (2009) feared would be the growing result of Higher Education selling itself via an 'investment explanation' (Davies et al 2014: 807). Ivy recounted:

Ivy: Yes, a lot of students did feel at the time when there was this essay out, everyone was getting the same sort of marks and a lot of people felt the same thing and they turned onto the school saying, well they clearly taught us wrong because no one got this essay question right. There were obviously a few people who managed to do it but they are the people who are kind of naturally gifted from the beginning and you could tell they were going to excel anyway. Yes, but the blame quickly shifted to the school, to

question was the material right, was it adequate for the essay question. What do we blame, the material or how the essay question was phrased?

Ivy's situation did resolve itself, after a meeting with the teaching team at departmental level. Students after were happier as they left feeling that what they had experienced was normal and reflected the jump from level 4 grading to level 5 grading in the move from first year to second year. Their experiences gel with discussions within liminal studies on student writing. The shift from one year to the next can be viewed upon as transitional and another moment when students can feel 'thrown back into newness' (Donahue 2011: 19). But from Ivy's perspective, a decline in marks required that it was treated as a 'cold risk' to be 'fixed at a departmental meeting with students.

The final example I will discuss draws from Lydia's account. Lydia reconciled the notion of 'harsh marking' in a different way to what has been discussed so far. Lydia felt that a harsh mark was okay and could be compensated by some detailed feedback that she could take forward and learn from. Correspondingly, Lydia felt that it was acceptable for a marker to give brief and vague feedback if their marking was similarly less precise leading to a more generous grade. In other words, Lydia felt there was something to be gained by and learnt from harsh markers, and something to be lost and denied from by more generous markers. Lydia declared:

Lydia: I find generally like the people who we classify as harsh markers tend to give better feedback and people I classify as lazy, lazy at feedback; you kind of associate with like lazy marking too.

I: So which would you prefer then?

Lydia: That's what I'm saying, it's like sometimes I don't know for example my dissertation I'm like I hope his marking is the same as his feedback because like I hope it, I don't know I feel like if I'm getting feedback and things that I can work on and improve on then yes I'm okay; be as harsh as you want, I know that I've done what you've told me to do but if its lazy, if you're lazy at giving me feedback but yet you're harsh at marking its not really fair, it's like you haven't given me feedback and you haven't guided me as to what direction I need to go to go the way I want but yet you're marking me on a higher ground than the feedback you're giving me so it's like I want it to be consistent. If you're harsh with marking then be good at giving me feedback, if you're a lazy marker then be lazy with feedback. I like it to be a balance in that sense.

Lydia's view suggested that harsh marking is tolerable if not advantageous if there is some sort of compensation that effectively cancels out the risk – i.e. making harsh markers a non-risk. In this standpoint, there are similar views of the way that education, including the moments that involve marking, hinges upon a series of varying human encounters (Biesta 2013). Lydia recognised the more circuitous benefits of harsh marking that were located not in the grade but in the justification of the grade awarded (i.e. through detailed feedback). Lydia seemed to perceive that there was some educational value in a harsh marker. Harsh markers were rigorous but in useful ways. Thus, Lydia's position intimated a different understanding of harsh marking that might be seen as 'the educational way' that is also 'the slow way, the difficult way, the frustrating way' (Biesta 2013: 3).

Marking has become a hot topic in relation to learning and teaching practices within Higher Education with marking procedures seeing a bit of an overhaul in the UK over the last twenty years (Handley and Read 2017). But a number of the students I talked to, despite a

focus within the academy on getting marking to something that is consistent via assessment criteria, felt that marking stood out as particularly unfair and inconsistent. Current marking practices, no matter how they are convened and documented, are seemingly not enough to sway student perception of the variability in the way their writing is marked – and perhaps rightly so (*see* O'Hagan and Wigglesworth 2015; Norton 2009; Read, Francis and Robson 2005; Baird, Greatorex and Bell 2004; Ecclestone 2001). That is not to say that marking should be *laissez-faire* – but there might be some wisdom for confessing to students that marking is not substantively objective after all and is something that often requires interpretation, thinking and persuasion. The question this raises is what potential there is in being more open with students about marking (*as posed by* Bloxham, den-Outer, Hudson and Price 2016)? The Academic Literacies lens has helped to unpack the complexities of writing but the complexities of marking involving judgement and subjectivity remain an underdiscussed aspect of writing for assessment in the academy.

7.5 Summary of chapter

Writing included a series of implicit and explicit risks in ways that can be delineated from what Thesen calls 'warm' and 'cold' risks. The students I talked to sometimes discussed with me how vagueness was a particular risk in relation to writing. They also suggested the ways in which variability across staff members could also constitute risks. And finally, a number of the students I talked to made specific reference to what they called 'harsh markers'. The way students spoke about risk inferred differences about the ways they were perceiving these risks. For many, risks in writing were attached to issues of power in ways similar to what Academic Literacies thinking has so far denoted through their contribution to the field

of student writing. However, other students talked about risks in a way that was underscored by a consumer logic; seeing risks as 'cold' and therefore in need of being 'fixed'. Yet, a minority of my students saw risk differently again. Risk was sometimes seen as an inevitable part of writing that was stirred up by the humanity of both Higher Education encounters generally, and student writing endeavours specifically. The chapter revealed the myriad of ways that students saw and understood the challenges and risks of writing in a consumer-led Higher Education system.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In my concluding chapter, a summary of my thesis reviews the research aim and supporting questions. I will outline briefly what was discussed and sum up how my thesis answers the research brief. Additionally, I suggest its contribution to the field, acknowledge the limitations of the study, and suggest what might follow in terms of future research or implications for practice.

8.2 Summary of the findings

My thesis aimed to:

explore how student writing is understood, viewed and experienced by student writers within the varying and sometimes competing narratives of Higher Education in a consumer-led Higher Education sector

The research questions underpinning the research aim were:

- How do student writers negotiate the longstanding ethos of discovery and knowledge advancement against the newer versions of Higher Education endorsing individual gain?

- How do student writers in terms of the way they view, experience and approach writing reconcile differing and sometimes competing narratives?

- And, how do students negotiate the difficulties in writing *but also* what do they see as the pleasures and privileges, if any, in writing?

In exploring the first research question, the thesis has discussed the ways that students negotiated the competing aims of Higher Education by:

- o Working within the parameters of the 'rules' of writing

- o Finding ways to exercise 'voice' within the 'rules' of writing

- o Sometimes flouting the 'rules' in favour of personal interests

- o By writing in compliant ways either willingly, reluctantly, consciously or otherwise

In exploring the second research question, the thesis has discussed the ways students reconciled competing narratives relating to writing in the following ways:

- o By accepting that to do well, writing compliantly might have to replace their own 'real' views with 'preferred' staff views

- o By understanding writing compliantly as a must-do, a loss or an annoyance

- o By identifying writing risks as issues to do with power

- o By viewing some writing risks as 'cold' and in need of managing, limiting or fixing

In exploring the third research question, the thesis has discussed the ways in which students saw pleasures, privileges and satisfactions in writing:

- By viewing their writing as reaching audiences beyond those that will mark their writing

- By enjoying writing and relishing the 'flow' and feelings of pride that come about from writing

- By acknowledging how their world view and ability to be critical has changed as a result of writing

- By viewing writing risks as inevitable and as an inherent part of engaging in education

8.3 The contribution to the field

Concerns in relation to the consumer era of Higher Education have been debated amongst academics since the early 1990s (*see* Hill 1995; Harvey 2000; Deluchi and Korgen 2002; Lizzio, Wilson and Simons 2002). As the Higher Education sector becomes further established as consumer-driven, these concerns remain prominent in Higher Education research (*see* Williams 2013; Ingleby 2015; Bunce, Baird and Jones 2017; Nixon, Scullion and Hearn 2018). At the same time, questions are now being raised about the suitability of seeing students as consumer-led in their orientations to Higher Education study (Raaper 2018). In unpacking the ways in which the student-as-consumer mantra may not capture what Higher Education is like for many undergraduate students, my thesis reveals a more nuanced understanding of student writing in today's UK HE system.

One alternative viewpoint discussed in my thesis is the use of Beck's (1992) Risk Society. The prevailing nature of risk in modern times helps to capture the more affective aspects of Higher Education, especially as it plays out in writing. Risk can be used to think about the 'double duty' (Boud 2000) of assessment that must at once measure and stimulate learning. Writing must be good if it is to make worthwhile the time, money and effort spent on Higher Education. The pressure of writing needing to be good can be understood as a type of strain that stains the way Higher Education is experienced and fuels the need to write in assessment-driven ways. But writing in these types of ways is not always welcomed or wanted by students – it is just that they may not see another way of going about things.

My thesis has suggested that there are conforming tendencies in student writing, and a number of different ways that the students reconciled the compliant and obliging approaches they used to shape their writing. Amongst these compliant ways of writing – the tactics, strategies and coping mechanisms applied by students in order to make the grade - there were also alliances made with the more traditional notions of Higher Education, and traces of disciplinary differences across student writer accounts. Therefore the student writers I talked to occupied contradicting spaces as writers. They saw their writing as linked to learning and discovery within their disciplines(s), as well as linked to amassing graduate capital in variant and diverging ways. Writing happened in these competing tensions and, at times, amounted to what felt like being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

I have suggested that these types of divergent narratives gleaned from the student writers in my study can be thought of theoretically using Thesen and Cooper's work on 'voice' and 'risk' that are part of a 'tilting point' that either delivers or silences writing endeavours.

While the notion of a 'tilting point' was originally applied to consider academic writing from the perspective of postgraduate and early career researchers in the global south, I have explored the ways in which it may usefully capture undergraduate writing in the UK within a consumer-led Higher Education system.

To this end, I have drawn from their use of 'voice' to consider the times when students felt they had agency in writing, and the times when they did not. In the former cases, I adopted Thesen's notion of 'centrifugal forces' to consider how students saw opportunities and possibilities in writing. As part of the discussion, I connected student views to Academic Literacies thinking to explore issues to do with power and audience. It was suggested that some of my students saw other audiences in writing, and reflected on their own power or responsibility that was connected to writing. I also explored the times when students suggested they exercised 'voice' through their writing in ways that entailed leaving aspects of themselves through the prose, style, or creativity injected into their work. In sum, I contributed a discussion around the ways in which student writers feel they have sway in writing.

But these moments of agency within student writing were discussed in tandem with the ways in which writing could be stifling and could prompt more strategic approaches. Thus, it was discussed how writing could feel like a pursuit that essentially made them feel stuck between a rock and a hard place. While wanting to write in more expansive and experimental ways, students found it safer and wiser to stick rigidly to guidance and individual steers from lecturers in order to secure good grades in their work. To explore these types of sentiments expressed by some of the students I talked to, I drew from

Thesen's notion of 'centripetal forces' to discuss how writing became drawn to conventions and stipulations in ever more dominating ways. I have discussed how these tendencies are adopted by students in sometimes reluctant ways that promote 'unwanted effects' (Norton *et al* 2001: 271). In other words, rather than students unreflectingly maximising grades through the use of strategies, many saw writing tactically as something they had to do. My thesis has therefore suggested that the consumer label, while capturing the drive for grade gain and capital amassment, does not sufficiently apprehend the ways that some students feel diminished as writers. Views shared by my participants ranged in the ways they talked about having to write in restrictive ways, and in ways that seemed outside of what they saw as necessary for, or even related to, the demands of the discipline they were studying. Some suggesting it was an annoyance or a pain, others suggesting that it limited their writing (and by extension, learning), and some suggesting that it was a loss of voice. In the latter camp, student writing sometimes seemed meaningless to students and subsequently writing was carried out as a type of lip service to the academy. As Thesen urges, 'when voices do not carry as hoped, we must ask why' (2014: 6). I would hasten to add that when student writing is reduced to a type of echo chamber, we must treat this as a cause for concern.

The final chapter dealt with the challenges and risks of writing. In sum, students highlighted three areas of risk: vagueness, staff variation and harsh markers. My thesis discussed the differing ways that these problem areas were perceived by the students in my study. While some students identified issues of power that were often commensurate with the Academic Literacies thinking, other students discussed these challenges in different ways. Some students spoke about these issues as 'cold risks' that could and should be fixed, managed, or ruled out. But other students were more accepting of risk as an integral and unavoidable

part of writing. The myriad of ways that students responded to the challenges of writing suggested a multiplicity to academic literacies involving different ways of viewing power and risk.

In summary, the original contribution of the thesis is as follows:

- Student writers feel connections to audiences that exist beyond academia

- Student writers find ways to deposit aspects of themselves (using centrifugal forces) into their writing in ways that challenge the subordination viewpoint in Academic Literacies

- Student writers experience personal rewards in relation to writing that tend to be an under-discussed aspect of Academic Literacies research

- Assessment guidance curtails writing to varying degrees in ways that sometimes involves a loss of 'voice'

- Individual preferences curtail writing in relation to the content of ideas in ways that can install a type of temporal prescriptivism in the way writing gets done by students

- The curtailing aspects of writing (the centripetal forces) sometimes makes writing feel meaningless

- Key writing risks in today's consumer-led climate includes vagueness, variability and harsh markers

- Student response to writing risks are varied inasmuch as being appreciative of power, humanness and consumer logic

Additionally, the thesis contributes an adaptation of Thesen's theoretical notions of 'risk', 'voice' and 'the tilting point' in ways that shed additional light on Academic Literacies for undergraduate student writers. The thesis applies Thesen's ideas around the ways that 'centripetal and centrifugal forces' shape 'the postgraduate condition' to capture what might be understood as 'the undergraduate condition'. The use of risk, therefore, provides a new way to understand student Academic Literacies within today's consumer-led Higher Education system.

8.4 Limitations to the research

The study is based on a very small sample and therefore does not provide a generalizable picture. However, the study can be viewed as providing what Larsson (2009) refers to as 'context similarity'. The students who I spoke to represent themselves (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011) and their views may be of interest to practitioners and professionals working in comparable settings working with comparable student groups.

The sample was also a mix of students in terms of subjects being studied and the student year of study. They were also all from one institution and so views and experiences may be seen as specific to the 'institutional habitus' (Reay, David and Ball 2005) – *i.e.* the nature and characteristics that qualitatively shape a university. An alternative way to consider the sampling strategy employed is through the commonality unifying the students I talked to. All were studying within an established consumer-led Higher Education system involving high tuition fees and satisfaction surveys such as NSS. The university also can be seen as

lending itself well to Academic Literacies inspired research. The majority of students study Joint Honours degree programmes and therefore study two disciplines that requires them to 'course switch' (Lea and Street 1998). Therefore, students are more likely to have experienced and reflected on disciplinary differences within academic study – a cornerstone aspect of Academic Literacies theory that suggests student writing should be understood at the level of epistemology.

The university also occupies an interesting space in the landscape of Higher Education. It is a pre-1992 University, but not a Russell Group and therefore represents a kind of middle space within the Higher Education sector. The student population is therefore more likely to represent a 'middle ground' compared to student populations from either elite universities or widening participation universities who may be more demographically polarised.

Another limitation of the study is the way that the data is gleaned entirely from interviews. Academic Literacies research is usually ethnographic and its traditions encourage multiple interviews at least, with examples of texts used as part of the interviewing process. My own research relies on a series of one-off in-depth interviews with students without any review of their writing. My research could therefore be challenged as providing what Lillis (2008) refers to as mere 'glimpses' rather than getting to the 'truth'. But I am skeptical about interviews as ever being able to access 'truths' (Roulston 2010). The conversations I had with students allowed them to reflect and talk about what they thought about writing in generic terms. The approach can therefore be understood as similar to what Thesen describes as 'written retrospectively, to explore dimensions of experience' (2014: 17). These types of conversations, that also foregrounded the views of students, provided the

'headlines' about what stayed with students about student writing. Therefore, while apart from Academic Literacies traditional methodological approaches, my own study sought out what can be thought of as the 'lasting impressions' of student writing. In doing so, I was able to explore accounts and views of student writing, and ultimately, answer the research aim and questions underpinning this study.

8.5 Suggestions and implications for future research and practice

Many students recounted different ways of how they have had to adopt ventriloquated approaches to writing. Yet ventriloquation did not necessarily mean increased satisfaction or understanding. In the academy's urge to 'satisfy' students, there appears to be an under-discussed danger relating to the overprovision of writing guidance – that brings few gains and is perhaps beyond what is appropriate for Higher Education level study. More research inclusive of a quantitative nature may be needed to capture the extent to which student writing is viewed in these types of ways. Further research could also be used to ascertain to what extent academy practices such as the overprovision of writing guidance are viewed by student writers as problematically curtailing. To this end, Q-Methodology could provide a useful methodological approach in future research. Q Methodology relies on qualitative data to develop what is referred to as its Q sets to generate a 'quantitative dimension' (Ellingsen, Storksen & Stephens 2010: 395). The quantitative component can therefore be recruited to contextualise data from individual semi-structured interviews (Ellingsen, Storksen & Stephens 2010). Q Methodology is also understood to contextualise qualitatively rich data by providing a wider range of viewpoints (Bradley & Miller 2010) but within rank

orders (Watts and Stenner 2012). Therefore, the data in this thesis could be used to generate statements that would form the Q sets needed to mobilise Q Methodology research.

For practitioners, a number of aspects relating to the analysis of the data within the study may be useful in informing practice. According to the student views and accounts, precise guidance in relation to writing tends to flounder on a number of fronts. The outcome of which raises questions around how, in what way, and how much should writing be supported, and what might be a step too far. In other words, what level of writing guidance might lead to the active curtailing of writing – particularly in a climate when so much hinges on grades. Student writers will face challenges in their writing that are near impossible to remove. Academic staff and writing support staff may be better off thinking about how they can help students manage the challenges of writing instead of devising ways to remove them. Attempts to close the 'gap' that Lea (2004) saw as 'irresolvable' perhaps creates an illusion of rights and wrongs in writing – which may be problematic for disciplines built on debate and discussion. Instead, It might be advisable to:

- Consider the variety of audiences that exist in relation to writing and to consider how these types of audiences may relate to writing tasks

- Help students challenge assessment criteria as opposed to be limited by it

- Encourage students to consider the ways in which the nature of the assessment task reflects the needs and conventions of the discipline they are studying

- Consider assessment tasks that are project-led, such as traditional dissertation modules, to allow students to feel ownership over their work

- Discuss with students variability and vagueness in ways that point out when these are expected aspects of writing, and when these are unacceptable aspects of writing, so that students are better placed to delineate between what to and what not to expect

- Consider discussing with students staff experiences and views of writing and writing practices

8.6 Thesis Summary

Using semi-structured interviews and network data analysis, this thesis has explored how students see writing as offering possibilities, as offering limitations and as being inclusive of risks. The discussion has drawn from Academic Literacies alongside Thesen's notion of 'the tilting point' in order to capture how writing builds disciplinary identities and understanding alongside amassing human capital; and how these tensions are thought about by student writers. My thesis therefore uses student writing as a lens to problematize the consumer view of students. While students operate within a consumer context, their views and accounts of writing suggest that their encounters with the academy are shaped in much more complex ways, evoking issues to do with 'voice' and 'risk'. What can be learnt from this is the ways in which writing offers opportunities to challenge consumer driven Higher Education policies that increasingly shape Higher Education practices. Students can and do resist such drives and efforts made to deliver satisfaction may result in the opposite: of being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

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Appendix A: Information Sheet (pilot study)

Information Sheet

Study Title: **Student Experiences of Academic Writing**

Aims of the Research
To explore how students experience academic writing, how they approach the practice of academic writing, and how they utilise and perceive essay writing help and guidance.

Invitation
You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study '**Student Experiences of Academic Writing'**. This project is being undertaken by Verity Aiken

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been chosen?
I am contacting students who have been suggested to me by a friend who is a current XXXX student.. I am also asking you because you are an undergraduate student studying a relevant social science discipline and this is precisely the perspective I am interested in hearing from.

Do I have to take part?
You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be invited to attend an interview in March. The interview will last about an hour. And will be held at a time and location that is convenient to you. Participation is not mandatory and names will not be disclosed during any part of the project.

If I take part, what do I have to do?

If you are willing to take part in an interview, you will need to be able to spare approximately one hour of your time. During the interview , you will be asked to talk about your experiences of academic writing, your approaches to it and your opinions of different types of available support.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

You will be able to share your opinions and experiences of academic writing. . This might be useful in thinking through how you approach academic writing and might alter how you view your writing in the future. There is also the longer term possibility of influencing how academic writing is supported in Higher Education.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

This project is unlikely to carry any risks for its participants although it is not predictable what emotions this might provoke during the interview.

How will information about me be used?

Participants will be identified as undergraduate students of related social science and humanities disciplines only. The discussion held as part of the interview will be recorded and then transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcriptions have been made and the transcription will be kept as a confidential record on a password protected computer owned by the interviewer. The information collected will be retained for possible use by the interviewer only and for no more than 4 years. It may contribute to future research studies that are also conducted by the interviewer. Participants consenting to this study are also consenting for the information to be used in future studies also conducted by the interviewer and only within the next four years.

Who will have access to information about me?

There will be limited information about you available to anyone at any stage of the process. The information collected will focus upon your opinions and experiences. The project will identify participants as undergraduate students of humanities and relevant social science disciplines only. Pseudo names will be used in the place of real names.

Participants should also be aware that I also have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example in circumstances whereby I am made aware of future criminal activity, abuse either to yourself or another (i.e. child or sexual abuse) or suicidal tendencies I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Who is funding and organising the research?

I am doing this project as part of my doctoral research as a student of Keele University on the Professional Doctorate of Education programme. I am self-funded.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher(s) who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Verity Aiken on

v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk . Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher(s) you may contact my supervisor for this study, Sally Findlow on s.findlow@keele.ac.uk

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Research & Enterprise Services
Dorothy Hodgkin Building
Keele University
ST5 5BG
E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk
Tel: 01782 733306

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: **Student Experiences of Academic Writing**
Name of Principal Investigator: *Verity Aiken*

**Please tick box if you
agree with the statement**

1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.	☐
3	I agree to take part in this study.	☐
4	I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.	☐
5	I agree to the focus group being audio recorded	☐
6	I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects	☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

*please delete as appropriate

CONSENT FORM
(for use of quotes)

Title of Project: Student Experiences of Academic Writing

Name of Principal Investigator: *Verity Aiken*

**Please tick box if you
agree with the statement**

1   I agree for any quotes to be used   ☐

2   I do not agree for any quotes to be used   ☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix C: Email call to participants (pilot study)

Dear ……

My name is Verity Aiken and I am a research student studying a Professional Doctorate of Education (EdD) at Keele University.

You may also remember me from XXXX, and from the focus group that you took part in at the end of this module.

I have since left XXXX University as an employee and now work as a Lecturer within the School of Education at Nottingham Trent University. I am currently undertaking a pilot study to help me develop my thesis ideas for my EdD. As part of this, I am hoping to conduct a Focus Group before the Easter holidays with a small number of undergraduate students studying within the disciplines of social science and humanities. I am now contacting the students who participated in the focus group last year because you can offer this perspective and you have come together successfully as a focus group in the past.

You are in no way obliged to take part in this research and it is a completely separate study that I conducted with your help last year. If you do wish to take part, your identity will be anonymised and all data will be securely kept behind a password protected PC. You will also be able to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason. The focus group will take place in a teaching room on XXXX campus during the day and within the normal working week. Light refreshments in the way of tea, coffee and biscuits will be made available.

I have attached an Information Sheet, and a Consent Form for your perusal. If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to ask.

Warmest Regards

Verity Aiken
EdD Student
Keele University

Appendix D: Advert text calling for participants (pilot study)

Interviewees wanted Do you have something to say about your experiences of academic writing? I am an EdD student studying at Keele University and want to talk to students about their views on academic writing. If you can spare an hour of your time, I'd love to hear from you - I am more than happy to work around your schedule. If you think you might be willing to take part, please email me at v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk.

Appendix E: Email snowballing call to participants (pilot study)

Dear ……

My name is Verity Aiken and I am a research student studying a Professional Doctorate of Education (EdD) at Keele University.

I am currently undertaking a pilot study to help me develop my thesis ideas for my EdD. As part of this, I am hoping to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews before the Easter holidays with a small number of undergraduate students studying within the disciplines of social science and humanities. I am now contacting students who have been suggested to me by a current XXXX student, to see if they would be willing to participate in an interview

You are in no way obliged to take part in this research. If you are able to take part, your identity will be anonymised and all data will be securely kept behind a password protected PC. You will also be able to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason. The interview will take place on XXXX campus at a time and place that is convenient to you.

I have attached an Information Sheet that gives specific detail on the nature of my research, and a Consent Form for your perusal. If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to ask.

Warmest Regards

Verity Aiken
EdD Student
Keele University

Student Experiences of Academic Writing

Introduction

I am writing to seek ethical approval for a pilot study. The pilot contributes to the taught part of a Professional Doctorate in Education at Keele University. My research will explore student experiences of academic writing and I am seeking ethical approval to conduct three semi-structured interviews to help inform the ultimate focus of my wider EdD research.. I am specifically interested in understanding more about the experiences of undergraduate students who are studying within humanities and social science disciplines. I will be exploring students' approaches to academic writing by asking about their study habits such as how they select what to write, how they use the library, how they consider the question and how they piece the information together to form an answer. I will also ask what sort of guidance they might seek out, including study support services, and the perceived value of those services and sources of guidance.

Methodology

My pilot study will consist of three in-depth semi-structured interviews. The data gleaned from this method will help me do two things: (1) decide on the foci of my wider EdD research and (2) aid in the development of its theoretical framework.

1) Sampling

.

My research aims to contribute to an understanding of widening participation in Higher Education. Existing literature has provided an in-depth account of the mismatch between non-traditional students and the academy as they transition into Higher Education, although the rise in student numbers has arguably brought about change for all students entering Higher Education. The broadening of HE has resulted in deepening staff:student ratios raising questions about the facilitation of learning and precipitating the development of wider support strategies in the form of central services. I see this as the wider context within which my research is located. The specific focus of my research is to explore

how students are experiencing academic writing in this new terrain. As such, the parameters of my sample group are set by the discipline that participants are studying and the level that they are studying it at, rather than their socio-economic background that is more commonly found in widening participation literature.

I will use an information sheet to make it absolutely clear that they should not feel obliged to do this focus group and that I am no longer a member of staff at the university and am approaching them as a student on the EdD programme.

2) Access

I will be using a gatekeeper as a lead into finding potential participants for my research. I have asked a personal friend who is an undergraduate student to identify fellow students who may be willing to participate and would be happy for me to contact them. Potential participants will be emailed directly via their XXXX email addresses through my own XXXX email address. The email I will send to the students will attach an "information sheet' for their information. It will also introduce myself as an EdD student and the research I am carrying out before inviting them to participate in a semi-structured interview. I will explain that I am emailing them because they have been suggested has somebody who might be willing to be interviewed but should not feel obliged to accept this invitation to participate. .

3) Student Focus group:

The interviews will take place during Semester two ahead of the Easter break. It will be held on XXXX campus as a place that is familiar to the students. It will be re-iterated to the students that attending the interviews is entirely voluntary and that every effort will be made to ensure their identities will be kept confidential. They will be given the Information Sheet again and made aware that they can withdraw at any time. The conversation will be recorded using an MP3 player. This will be downloaded onto a computer after the interview has taken place. The recording will then be wiped from the MP3 player and the data will be stored on a password protected PC. The conversation will be guided by 8 – 10 questions and should take no longer than 45 minutes. The questions will be coined to harvest student opinion of their experiences of academic writing and their views on sourcing additional help including of support in the form of study support guidance.

Proposed Timeline

Date	Planned Activity
Early March 2013	Await ethical clearance
Early March 2013	Email students
Mid March 2013	Arrange interview dates and rooms according to student availability
Late March 2013	Conduct interviews

Appendix G: Ethics Application Form (pilot study)

School of Education

Student Project Ethics Committee
Application form (U/G and PGT Students)

This application form is for use by undergraduate / PGT Students and **must be:-**
- completed for every project involving human participants/subjects/human tissues[1]
- authorised by your supervisor &/or module leader
- accompanied by a summary of your project proposal, and where appropriate, a copy of the participant
   information sheet, consent form and questionnaire or interview schedule

APPROVAL MUST BE OBTAINED <u>BEFORE</u> potential participants are approached to take part in your project.

Student Name:	Verity Aiken
Course:	Professional Doctorate in Education
Status:	**POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENT** (please delete as appropriate)
Keele Email address:	v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk
Supervisor:	N/A
Title of Project:	Student Experiences of Academic Writing
Proposed start date:	1st Feb 2013 or as soon as possible thereafter
Proposed end date for 'field work' (e.g. interviews):	Late Feb to Early March 2013. Within this time frame, depending on student availability.

HUMAN TISSUES[1]

Does your project involve the use of human tissues?	/ NO (delete as appropriate)

PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT

Will you inform participants of all aspects of the project that might reasonably be expected to influence willingness to participate and in particular, any negative consequences that might occur?	YES / (delete as appropriate)
Will all participants be provided with a written information sheet?	YES (delete as appropriate)

---

[1]Human tissues which originate from projects external to Keele and which have received recognised peer review at source should be identified in the accompanying project proposal and should include documentary evidence (for example, a letter from those supplying the tissues) from their source which confirms that ethical review is in place for the proposed use of the tissues at Keele.

Where tissues are the only subject of any proposal then all questions relating to Participants should be left blank.

If YES, The information sheet should normally include the following sections:- • Aims of the project • Clearly states that this is a student project • Why the participant has been chosen • What will happen to participants if they take part • A discussion of the possible disadvantages, risks and benefits of taking part • The procedures for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity (if appropriate) • Contact details of the project leader and the course/module leader plus details of additional support agencies (if necessary) **If NO**, or if an information sheet is not the best way of informing participants, please explain here. A template for participant information sheets is available from the Research & Enterprise Services Website via the following link http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchgovernance/researchethics/	
Will you ensure that participants know of their right to withdraw at any stage from the project?	**YES** (delete as appropriate)
Will informed consent be obtained? **If YES**, please attach a copy of the consent form which will be used for the project **If NO**, or if a consent form is not appropriate for any reason, please explain here. If the project involves participants under 16, will informed consent also be obtained from parents and/or other relevant adults (e.g. teachers if this is in a school setting)? **N/A** **If YES**, please provide details of information to be provided and of these consent arrangements **If NO**, please explain: Templates for consent forms are available from the Research & Enterprise Services Website via the following link http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchgovernance/researchethics/	**YES** (delete as appropriate)
What are the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (ie who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate)?	

Undergraduate students who are studying humanities or social science disciplines at XXXX University	
Please explain briefly (and in 'lay' terms) why you plan to use these particular criteria	
This is the focus of my research. I am interested in undergraduate students because they experience many transitions into and during their university time. I am targeting humanities and social science students because these disciplines frequently require their students to submit written assessments.	
Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? For these purposes, vulnerable participants are those whose abilities to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to the population as a whole. Vulnerability may arise from personal characteristics (such as mental or physical impairment) or from social context and disadvantage (e.g. lack of power, education, or resources). Prospective participants who are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, should also be considered as vulnerable. Children and adults lacking mental capacity are presumed to be vulnerable. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests? If YES does the research activity proposed require a CRB check? (information concerning activities which require CRB checks are can be accessed via http://www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk/ and http://www.keele.ac.uk/hr/policiesprocedures/crb/)	NO (delete as appropriate) NO (delete as appropriate)
Will participants require any special support to take part in the project (e.g. disability support, interpreter)? **If YES**, what sort of support?	NO (delete as appropriate)
Does the investigation involve observing participants unawares? **If YES**, what efforts will be made to respect their privacy, values and to minimise any risk of harmful consequences?	NO (delete as appropriate)
Will the anonymity &/or confidentiality of participants be maintained? **If YES,** how? Real names will not be used in the writing up of the data and the transcribing. The recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer. The nature of the discussion is highly unlikely to inadvertently reveal identities. The interview, ran as a focus group, will not be attempting to drill specifically into individuals' lives, and is more geared towards harvesting student opinion on academic writing and their approaches to it. **If NOT**, please give rationale for not doing so	YES (delete as appropriate)

PROCEDURES

Does the project involve people being investigated for a problem which has received medical, psychiatric, clinical psychological or similar attention? If yes, please give details	NO (delete as appropriate)

PROCESS

Will participants receive any reimbursements or other payments? **If YES**, how will they be reimbursed/compensated?	NO (delete as appropriate)
Does the project involve any of the following?:- Recall of personal or sensitive memories YES Although not highly personal or sensitive, it is possible that discussion of academic writing experiences could be a sensitive issue for some students. Students will be alerted to this in the 'information sheet'. Reporting or discussion of personal or sensitive topics YES Yes, mildly as above. Tasks which could be harmful or distressing to people NO A significant risk of participants later regretting taking part NO Procedures which are likely to provoke inter-personal or inter-group conflict NO	
Does the project research involve the analysis of data participants will not realise would be used by you for the purposes of the project (e.g. confidential criminal, medical or financial records)? **If YES**, please give rationale.	NO (delete as appropriate)
Does the project involve the possible disclosure of confidential or private information about one participant to another? **If YES**, please give rationale. Yes, this is possible during the focus group interview if one participant chooses to share their experiences with the other participants that they may deem as private or confidential. This will not be highly sensitive information but might cause some individuals embarrassment if they are anxious about their academic writing. I will be alerting students to issues surrounding disclosing information to the rest of the group during the interview at the start of the focus group. This will also be mentioned on the information sheet that participants receive in advance of the focus group.	YES (delete as appropriate)
Will the project leader (or a suitably qualified other person) debrief participants to ensure that they understand the nature of the project and monitor possible misconceptions or negative effects?	YES (delete as appropriate)

If NO, please give rationale.	
Are there any **other** ethical issues that you think might be raised by the project? **If YES**, please give details:	NO (delete as appropriate)

HEALTH & SAFETY

Does the project have any health & safety implications for the researcher? If yes, please outline the arrangements which are in place to minimise these risks	NO (delete as appropriate)
Does the research involve the student (UG/PGT) travelling outside the European Union? If YES, please complete the questions below If No, please go to Section D.	NO (delete as appropriate)
THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE FOR RESEARCH WHICH INVOLVES KEELE STUDENTS (UG/PGT) TRAVELLING OUTSIDE THE EUROPEAN UNION Have you consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/ **Non-UK Nationals** **H**ave you also sought travel advice/guidance from the Foreign Office (or equivalent body) of your country? If YES, will you be visiting any areas for which particular risks have been identified or for which the advice given is not to travel to this area? If YES (a) Please give details (b) Please outline the arrangements in place to manage these risks. Is the research covered by University Insurance? (Please contact Nicola Leighton on 01782 733306 for confirmation)	YES / NO (delete as appropriate) YES / NO (delete as appropriate) YES / NO (delete as appropriate) YES / NO (delete as appropriate)

SECTION D (to be completed by all applicants)

Signatures:	
	…V. Aiken………………………………. Date: …30th Jan 2013……… **Student** …………………………………………… Date: ……………………… **Supervisor or Course/Module Tutor**

Please complete and submit this form along with summary of your project proposal, and where necessary, a copy of the participant information sheet, consent form and questionnaire or interview schedule with this application form to your School Student Projects Ethics Committee.

Interview Questions

Opening/Background Questions

Can you start by giving a quick summary of your life to date, up to starting at University?

Was going to University an expected part of your life?

And can you tell me about your course, what you are studying, what year you are in and how much academic writing you do as part of it?

On Autobiographical Self

What is your opinion of academic writing?

How do you think your own life has shaped your views of writing and academic writing?

Has your view of academic writing changed since starting University?

On Approaches

How would you describe your approaches to academic writing?

What are your strengths in academic writing?

What are your weaknesses?

On Emotional Responses

What do you find most satisfying or rewarding about academic writing?

What is most challenging about it?

What emotions would you associate with essay writing?

What sort of feelings are provoked when you submit an essay?

What sort of feelings are provoked when you receive feedback for one of your essays?

Discoursal and Authoritative Self

When you are writing, how would you like to sound to the reader?

What sort of techniques do you use to help you achieve that?

When you are writing, how much authority do you feel you have over the topic you are writing about?

On navigating Support

Where would you be likely to go to if you wanted help with your academic writing?

Have you used study support or study skills support services to help develop your academic writing?

If yes,   - what were your perceptions of this support before you   sought it?
- In what ways, if any, did you benefit from this type of support?
- What feelings did using this service provoke? Would you consider using this sort of support again?

If no,   - why not?
- How do you perceive this type of support?
- Under what circumstances would you consider using this kind of support?

How do you think study skills support is viewed by students in general?

How would you like to see academic writing supported?

Final Questions

Can you give me an indication of the grades you are getting for your written work, and a quick indication of how happy you are with those marks?

All things considered, is there anything you would like to add relating your experiences of academic writing and seeking out support and guidance in the development of your academic writing?

Appendix I: Notes from the pilot study (first impressions)

A double deficit model

Academic Literacies theory explains 'study skills services' as part of the 'Skills Model', and ultimately as an inadequate way of supporting the development of academic writing amongst undergraduate students. Lea and Street (1998) argue that the Skills Model, as an institutional response to the issue of student writing, is a deficit model as it locates the problem with the student.

All respondents spoke about one-to-one study skills services as something that 'wasn't for them', seeing it as a provision put in place for near-failing students. Whilst all agreed that it was important that the service was available for students to use, its function was viewed as a 'last resort'. Here, the Skills Model is made up of a 'double-deficit', firstly pathologised implicitly by the institution (Lea and Street 1998) and secondly pathologised by students own internalization of the model.

Workshops were seen in a more favourable light, and opinion of their value and function within the University was mixed. For some, workshops were a useful aid in the transitioning from college into University and served as a reassurance and a means to make transparent the expectations of Higher Education. For others, they were seen as something with potential value and as something they 'should have' attended, but never managed to make the additional time needed to go to them. For one student, it was seen as something they might attend with a friend if they had a common reason to go. For one, the workshop was seen as part of the Skills Model, possibly useful for some students but ultimately out of context and not particularly contributory to their advancement within their own discipline.

Standardisation

All respondents indicated that their experiences of academic writing would be better supported if there was a greater consistency across assignments and across tutor expectations in relation to the requirements of their academic writing. Respondents felt that there was variation in expectations from tutors and that this was something to be continually navigated learning new rules depending on who was marking the work. This variation was also cited in relation to different types of assignments and how approaches had to be continually adapted to make fit the needs of particular assignments. The variation was expressed as an 'inconsistency' by the respondents. This is in contrast to how they viewed other aspects of academic writing, which acknowledged aspects of creativity in the writing process and the synthesis of multiple interpretations necessary to make sense of their disciplines. This sense of meaning-making and interpretation was not extended to how they viewed tutor and course expectations of writing. There was an implicit request for 'standardisation'.

Textual habitus

Part of my interest in this research lies in whether or not there may be such a thing as a textual habitus. I see textual habitus as a manifestation of individual habitus residing in academic writing. The interview data I have is not in-depth enough to allow me to make claims over whether or not a textual habitus could be used as an appropriate interpretation of the development of student academic writing, but emerging observations based on the data that I do have can be summed up thusly: Respondents tended to implicitly acknowledge the existence of both a familial habitus and an institutional habitus in their decision to attend University. For some respondents, reference to their family habitus or institutional habitus was made in relation to their comments about their experiences of academic writing. One respondent frequently referred to her mum, an English teacher, as an important guide in getting the tone, grammar, language and structure right in her academic work. One respondent talked about how their School, at which they were based until leaving for University, prided itself in English and how much prominence was given to the ability to write and express oneself well. Another respondent talked about her family being 'not very academic', repeating this several times during the course of the interview. The same respondent also described her educational background as more scientific and used this as an explanation for why her written work for her social science discipline was not as proficient as her work submitted for her scientific discipline.

Le Sense Pratique

A 'feel for the game' was evident on several occasions during the interview. It was also evident that some students perceived their own 'feel for the game' more strongly than other students. In part, this has been interpreted through approaches to writing and in part, interpreted through advice and guidance is sought. For the former, respondents mentioned knowing what sort of sources to look for, knowing how to 'tackle' and unpick a question, and knowing how to be measured whilst also driving forward an actual answer to the question given. For the latter, some respondents cited friends and family as possible sources of support in order to help develop their academic writing. Others seemed quicker to cite their lecturer as the person they would approach for guidance on their written work. The propensity for approaching lecturing staff for guidance on their academic writing could infer 'le sense pratique'. This is further supported by how approaching an academic member of staff for guidance on academic writing is bounded by a series of 'conditions': it can't be a trivial matter, it can't be a small matter, it can't be something that is fixable through talking to peers; and so on. Understanding this set of informal rules and navigating them successfully in order to be able to pinpoint the precise set of conditions that make approaching an academic member of staff feasible, is something that requires a 'feel for the game', or 'le sense pratique'.

NTS: Practice of symbolic violence, embodiment of the habitus – the body is central as in the navigation of services there is a bodily presentation of self in the physical pursuit of help/advice from staff..

Capital

Here, capital is being viewed as an asset that contains an exchangeable value. During the course of the five interviews, the issue of capital emerges in relation to how one might seek

guidance on their academic writing. Lecturing staff were viewed as the sources of information to help support their academic writing with the greatest amount of cultural capital, with study skills staff being seen as possessing comparatively less. This was articulated through the notion of lecturing staff being seen as a legitimate means of knowledge and one-to-one study skills services being either superficial and out-of-context, or a separate service for struggling or near-failing students.

NTS: ref to McRobbie (2004) 'Notes on 'What not to wear' and post-feminist symbolic violence – 'what emerges is a new regime of more sharply polarized class positions, shabby failure or well-groomed success' (2004: 101)

Performativity

Some reference was made to academic writing as a type of performance in the way that the rules of academic writing were played out in text.

One respondent also discussed her long-held desire to obtain a first for one of her assignments. She recounted on when she finally got a first for one of her essays, she took a photo of the grade and posted it on Facebook and received 100 'likes'.

Field

Students located their views in the context of XXXX University. One expressed that the strong support systems in place was one of the reasons she had selected XXXX as the place she wanted to study for her degree.

Information Sheet

Study Title: *The risky terrain of student writing*

Aims of the Research

To explore how students experience the practice of academic writing and their views of the processes involved.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study *'The risky terrain of student writing'.* This project is being undertaken by myself, *Verity Aiken, for my doctoral study as part of an EdD at Keele University, under the supervision of Dr Sally Findlow*

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Why have I been invited?

I am contacting students who have responded to find out more following an open call for participants. I am also asking you because you are an undergraduate student and this is precisely the perspective I am interested in hearing from. During the interview, the questions will cover issues relating to what you study, what sorts of written work you do, how you feel about the process of academic writing and what sort of guidance is useful in supporting the writing process.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be invited to attend an interview. The interview will last about an hour and will be held at a time and location that is convenient to you. Interviews will be recorded with an MP3 device. Participation is voluntary and there are no adverse consequences should you decide not to take part. Names will not be disclosed during any part of the project.

If you are willing to take part in an interview, you will need to be able to spare approximately one hour of your time. During the interview, you will be asked to talk about your experiences of academic writing, your approaches to it and your opinions of how this may impact on the way you view the relationships you develop with staff and with the University.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

You will be able to share your opinions and experiences of academic writing. . This might be useful in thinking through how you approach academic writing and might alter how you view your writing in the future. There is also the longer-term possibility of influencing how academic writing is supported in Higher Education.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

This project is unlikely to carry any risks for its participants although it is not predictable what emotions this might provoke during the interview. In the event that the interview causes any upset, participants will be asked if they wish to pause the interview and the recording of the interview. Participants will then be offered the opportunity to either resume the interview at a time of their own choosing or to withdraw from the interview and the research. Participants will not be asked to give any reason for the decision they make and there are no adverse consequences for deciding to withdraw. Students are also advised that for advice and support relating to emotional well-being, they can access support from Student Support and Development Services from within the Counselling and Emotional Well-being team (http://www.keele.ac.uk/studentcounselling), and for advice and support relating to academic study skills, they can access support from Student Support and Development Services from within the Curriculum Support and Development team (http://www.keele.ac.uk/studysupport/).

How will information about me be used?

Participants will be identified as undergraduate students only. The discussion held as part of the interview will be recorded and then transcribed. The transcription will be kept as a confidential record on my own password protected computer and will be retained for a minimum of five years. It may contribute to future research studies that I also conduct although participants consenting to this study can decide whether or not they wish for the information to be used in future studies that I conduct and only within the next five years.

Who will have access to information about me?
There will be limited information about you available to anyone at any stage of the process. The information collected will focus upon your opinions and experiences. The project will identify participants as undergraduate students only. Pseudonyms will be used in the place of real names.

I do however have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example in circumstances whereby I am concerned over any actual or potential harm to yourself or others I must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Who is funding and organising the research?
I am doing this project as part of my doctoral research as a student of Keele University on the Professional Doctorate of Education programme. I am self-funded.

What if there is a problem?
In addition to services provided by Student Support and Development Services, if you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher(s) who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact *Verity Aiken* at *v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk*. Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher(s) you may contact my supervisor *Sally Findlow at s.findlow@keele.ac.uk*.

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Research & Enterprise Services
Dorothy Hodgkin Building
Keele University
ST5 5BG
E-mail: n.leighton@uso.keele.ac.uk
Tel: 01782 733306

Appendix K: Consent forms (substantive study)

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: *The risky terrain of student writing*
Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Verity Aiken available at v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk*

**Please tick box if you
agree with the statement**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 13th August 2014 version no.2. for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time

3. I agree to take part in this study.

4. I understand that data collected about me during this study will be anonymised before it is submitted for publication.

5. I agree to the interview being audio recorded

6. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

If you consent to participate in this study, it should be drawn to your attention that the researcher has a professional obligation to act upon any aspects of poor practice and/or unprofessional behaviour that may be disclosed during the research activity. Researchers should use the appropriate reporting mechanisms if they have witnessed or experienced poor practice and/or
professional behaviour.

CONSENT FORM
(for use of quotes)

Title of Project: *The risky terrain of student writing*

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: *Verity Aiken available at*
v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk

**Please tick box if you
agree with the statement**

1.   I agree for my quotes to be used

2.   I do not agree for my quotes to be used

_____   _____   _____

Name of participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

If you consent to participate in this study, it should be drawn to your attention that the researcher has a professional obligation to act upon any aspects of poor practice and/or unprofessional behaviour that may be disclosed during the research activity. Researchers should use the appropriate reporting mechanisms if they have witnessed or experienced poor practice and/or professional behaviour.

Appendix L: Invite for participants (substantive study)

Dear ……

My name is Verity Aiken and I am a research student researching undergraduate experiences and views of academic writing as part of a Professional Doctorate of Education (EdD) at Keele University.

As part of the research I am carrying out, I would like to conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students.

You are in no way obliged to take part in this research. If you are able to take part, your identity will be kept confidential and all data will be anonymised and securely kept behind a password protected PC. You will also be able to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason. The interview will take place on XXXX campus, or at another location if you prefer, at a time and place that is convenient to you at some point within the next four weeks if possible.

I have attached an Information Sheet that gives specific detail on the nature of my research, and a Consent Form for your perusal. If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to ask by emailing me at v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk.
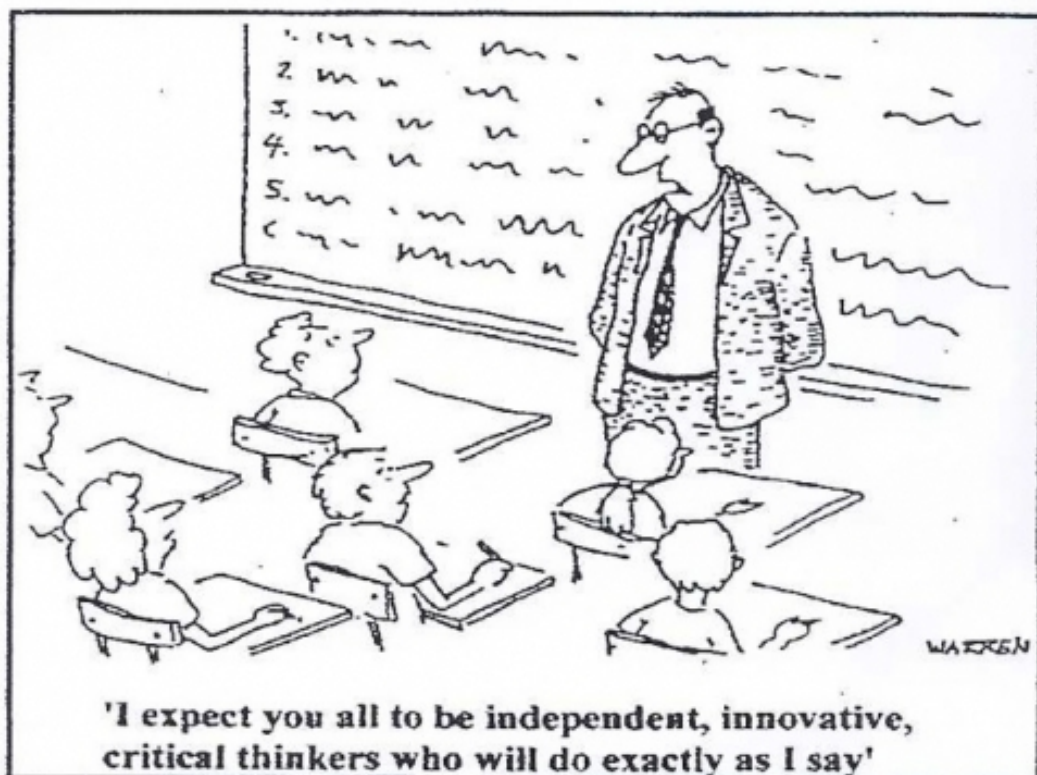
Yours sincerely

Verity Aiken
EdD Student
Keele University
v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk

Appendix M: Open call for participants (substantive study)

Open Call to participate

Volunteers wanted

Would you like to participate in a research project about academic writing?

'I expect you all to be independent, innovative, critical thinkers who will do exactly as I say'

I am an EdD student studying at Keele University and want to talk to students about their experiences of and views on academic writing. I am interested in hearing the views of any undergraduate student.

If you can spare an hour of your time, I'd love to hear from you - I am more than happy to work around your schedule.

If you think you might be willing to take part, please email me at v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk.

Please help yourself to a tear off strip:

Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk	Happy to share your views on academic v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk

Appendix N: Ethics application cover letter (substantive study)

<div align="right">
Ethical Review Panel
Research and Enterprise Services
Keele University
Keele
ST5 5BG
</div>

Dear ……,

Re: The risky terrain of student writing

Thank you for your response relating to the above research proposal that I submitted for ethical review. In consultation with my supervisor, Dr. Sally Findlow, I have made amendments to my documentation. Copies of these documents are attached and the changes that I have made have been highlighted within them in red. The documents have been updated to reflect the new date and version number. The changes, in summary, are in relation to:

ERP Form
- The research has been amended to include undergraduates from any discipline, as opposed to only social science and humanities undergraduate students
- There includes fuller acknowledgement of how this research area is a personal topic and how it can potentially therefore be of a sensitive nature. Linked to this are details relating to how any upsets will be handled during the course of the research
- Section 10 has been amended to denote that participant's identities will be kept confidential and that data will be anonymised
- Section 19 includes new information on how participants will be debriefed

Summary of proposal
- A rewritten articulation of the primary focus of my research
- An explanation of 'risk' as the sociological theoretical concept that frames the research (but will be introduced to the students sensitively and responsively, as a 'concept' that I am inviting them to think about – that is, *not* by way of flagging up that I think writing is risky for them personally)
- An amendment to the proposed sampling method used in the research

Information Sheet
- A new articulation of the overarching research aim
- Use of 'responded to' as opposed to 'self-selected'

- A more in-depth answer in place for the 'what are the risks?' section that includes details and contact emails for relevant departments of Student Support and Development Services
- The removal of 'not mandatory' in place of 'voluntary'
- The amendment that data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years
- Attention paid to the consistency of font and font size

Invitation Email
- The opening line has been amended to clearly introduce the research area being studied
- Changes have been made to state that identities will be kept confidential and data will be anonymised
- The sign off has been changed to 'yours sincerely'

Poster
- The phrasing has been changed to better denote that the research entails discussions relating to views and experiences of writing
- 'Volunteers' replaces 'interviewees'
- Reformatting of poster in general and new image used to make the poster more engaging
- But I have kept the tear-off strips because in the past I have found them useful for retaining contact details and know of other students who use them too.

Consent form
- Sections for signatures for the use of quotes has been added
- Attention paid to the consistency of font and font size

Interview Prompt Sheet
- The interview prompt sheet has been amended significantly to better fit the overarching research aim

I thank you again for your time and will await further response from the panel in relation to the revisions made in my research proposal for the purpose of ethical review.

Yours sincerely

Verity Aiken
EdD student

Appendix O: Ethics application form (substantive study)

ETHICAL REVIEW PANEL
Application Form (Staff and PGR Students)

- To be completed for every research project involving human participants/subjects;
- The form must be authorised by your Research Institute Director / (or for applicants who are members of RI Social Sciences the application can be signed off by your Research Centre Head)/Supervisor /Head of School as appropriate
- Both an electronic copy & hard copy of all documentation must be provided.

APPROVAL MUST BE OBTAINED <u>BEFORE</u> potential participants are approached to take part in any research.

Information regarding the completion of the ethical review panel application form:
Section A – To be completed by all applicants.
Section B – To be completed by applicants who have already obtained Ethics Approval from a separate committee.
Section C – To be completed by applicants requiring approval from a University Ethical Review Panel
Section D – To be completed by all applicants.

Further information regarding the completion of the application can be found in Section E (at the end of this document)

SECTION A (to be completed by all applicants)

Project Title:	The risky terrain of student writing
Proposed start date:	1st Sep 2014
Proposed end date for 'field work' (eg interviews):	1st July 2017
Name of Researcher (applicant):	Verity Aiken
Status:	**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT** (please delete as appropriate)
Research Institute or School if not in an Research Institute	Social Science
Keele Email address:	v.j.aiken@keele.ac.uk
Correspondence address:	100 Harriseahead Lane, Harriseahead, Stoke-on-Trent ST7 4RB
Keele Telephone number:	None

SECTION B (to be completed by applicants who have already obtained ethics approval from a separate committee)

Has your project already been approved by an ethics committee? (for example, an NHS research ethics committee) If **YES** the following documentation should be sent directly to the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee, C/O Nicola Leighton, University Research Ethics Committee Administrator, Research & Enterprise Services, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, e-mail n.leighton@keele.ac.uk, telephone 01782 733306	NO (pls delete as appropriate)

A completed and signed hard copy of this application form (please complete Sections A, B and D) and an electronic copy should also be e-mailed to n.leighton@keele.ac.uk	Signed hard copy: Electronic copy:	YES (pls delete as appropriate) YES (pls delete as appropriate)
Evidence of prior ethics approval from the hosting institution.	Copy of approval document:	YES / NO (pls delete as appropriate)

SECTION C (to be completed by applicants who have NOT already obtained ethics approval from a separate committee)

If your project requires approval by a University Ethical Review Panel (ERP).		
The following documentation should be forwarded to Nicola Leighton, Research & Enterprise Services, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, telephone 01782 733306. An electronic copy of the application form and all necessary documentation should also be e-mailed to uso.erps@keele.ac.uk An application cannot be considered until a signed copy is received and accompanied by an electronic copy.		
A completed and signed hard copy of this application form (please complete Sections A, C and D) and an electronic copy should also be e-mailed to uso.erps@keele.ac.uk	Signed copy attached: Electronic copy:	YES YES
A hard copy of the summarised project proposal **attached** to this form, **NO MORE THAN** two sides of A4 It may help the review of your project if you include a diagram to clearly explain the project (eg what activities will undertaken, by whom and when)		YES
An electronic copy of the summarised project proposal **Please ensure that the version number and date is clearly stated in footer of the proposal (approval may be delayed if these details are not included)**		YES
And, if (and only if) they are appropriate given the study's design and approaches;		
A letter of invitation for participants **Please ensure that the version number and date is clearly stated in the footer of the letter (approval may be delayed if these details are not included)**		YES (delete as appropriate)

An information sheet which should normally include the following sections:
  o Why the participant has been chosen;
  o What will happen to participants if they take part
  o A discussion of the possible disadvantages, risks and benefits of taking part
  o The procedures for ensuring confidentially and anonymity (if appropriate)
  o The proposed use of the research findings
  o Contact details of the principal investigator plus details of additional support agencies (if Necessary)
  o **Version number and date is clearly stated in the footer of the information sheet (approval may be delayed if these details are not included)**
 	
A template for a participant information sheet is available from the Research & Enterprise Services website via the following link
http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchgovernance/researchethics/
		YES
		(delete as appropriate)

A copy of the participant consent form/s; **Please ensure that the version number and date is clearly stated in the footer of the consent form (approval may be delayed if these details are not included)** Templates for consent forms are available from the Research & Enterprise Services website via the following link http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchgovernance/researchethics/		YES (delete as appropriate)
Copies of any questionnaire, interview schedules or topic guides. **Please ensure that the version number and date is clearly stated in the footer of these documents (approval may be delayed if these details are not included)**		YES (delete as appropriate)

(PARTICIPANTS' CONSENTS)

1. Will the researchers inform participants of all aspects of the research that might reasonably be expected to influence willingness to participate and in particular, any negative consequences that might occur? **If YES**, please give details: Potential participants will receive an invitation letter via email that will summarise the research project. Attached to the invitation letter will be the information sheet and copies of the consent sheet and the consent sheet for quotes. Potential participants will be invited to read through the documentation and to ask any questions relating to it. It will be explicitly expressed that they do not have to participate and do not have to give a reason for non-participation and if at any point during the process they wish to withdraw then they can do so without giving any reason or notice to. **If NO**, please explain:	YES (delete as appropriate)
2. Will all participants be provided with a written information sheet and be provided with an opportunity to provide (or withhold) written consent? **If YES**, please ensure that these documents are attached (see above). **If NO**, please explain why written consent &/or information is not appropriate for this study.	YES (delete as appropriate)
3. Is consent being sought for the dataset collected to be used for future research projects?	No (delete as appropriate)
4. What are the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate)? The research will involve undergraduate students who are studying at XXXX University **5. Please explain briefly (and in 'lay' terms) why you plan to use these particular criteria?** The very nature of my research question is to explore the views of higher education students. I am interested in undergraduate student perspectives in particular because for this group, adjusting to study at higher education level and getting to grips with academic writing is more pertinent than it is to other groups, such as postgraduate students.	
6. Will people who are vulnerable be allowed to take part in this study? For these purposes, vulnerable participants are those whose abilities to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to the population as a whole. Vulnerability may arise from personal characteristics (such as mental or physical impairment) or from social context and disadvantage (e.g. lack of power, education, or resources). Prospective participants, who are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, should also be considered as vulnerable. All children and adults who lack mental capacity are presumed to be vulnerable. **If NO**, please outline the rationale for excluding them: **The study involves the views of undergraduate students only. As part of this process, it is possible that the research might involve interviewing a participant who is vulnerable because of the potential sensitive nature of this research. All participants will be briefed on their right to take a break during the interview or to withdraw from the research if they change their mind and without giving any reasons for doing so. In addition, I will ensure that I am alert to the possibility of students becoming upset during the interview, or before or after the interview, and If any participant appears to find the interview emotionally difficult or uncomfortable, I will ask them if they wish to stop or continue with the interview. If extreme emotional anxiety is observed I will**	YES (delete as appropriate)

cease the interview and the recording of the interview automatically. If the situation is so acute that it deems necessary to do so, I will provide the participant with information regarding accessing additional support. **If YES**, what special arrangements (if any) are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests? **7**. **Does the research activity proposed require a Disclosure & Barring Scheme (DBS) disclosure?** (information concerning activities which require DBS checks are required can be accessed via https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance and http://www.keele.ac.uk/hr/policiesandprocedures/crbsafeguarding/ If you are unsure whether a DBS disclosure is required please contact Human Resources or Nicola Leighton prior to submission of this application form. If you answer YES please complete the relevant section below. If you answer no please go to question 8.	NO (delete as appropriate)
STAFF ONLY **7a** Have you (and other individuals who will be working on the research project) had a DBS disclosure initiated by Keele University?	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
7b If you have answered **YES to question 7a** please contact Human Resources to obtain a confirmation note indicating that a DBS disclosure has been previously initiated by Keele and that it was satisfactory. Is the confirmation note attached to this form?	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
If you have answered **NO to question 7a** please contact Human Resources immediately to arrange for a DBS disclosure to be applied for. You will still be able to apply for ethical approval in parallel to applying for a DBS disclosure. However, your project will not be approved by the ERP until you have forwarded the confirmation note from Human Resources indicating that a DBS disclosure has been undertaken and is satisfactory. Has Human Resources been contacted about this?	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
HOME/EU STUDENTS ONLY 7c Have you (and other individuals who will be working on the research project) had a DBS Disclosure (or equivalent) initiated by Keele University?	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
7d If you have answered **YES to question 7c** please contact the Admissions Officer, Admissions to obtain a confirmation note indicating that a DBS disclosure (or equivalent) has been previously initiated by Keele and that it was satisfactory. Is the confirmation note attached to this form?	
If you have answered **NO to question 7c** please contact the Admissions Officer immediately to arrange for a DBS disclosure (or equivalent) to be applied for. You will still be able to apply for ethical approval in parallel to applying for a DBS disclosure. However, your project will not be approved by the ERP until you have forwarded the confirmation note from Nicola Leighton indicating that a DBS disclosure has been undertaken and is satisfactory. I confirm the Admissions Officer has been contacted and a DBS disclosure (or equivalent) has been initiated.	YES / NO (delete as appropriate) YES / NO (delete as appropriate
INTERNATIONALSTUDENTS ONLY Please contact Nicola Leighton on 01782 733306 or e-mail n.leighton@keele.ac.uk before completing this section 7e Have you (and other individuals who will be working on the research project) had a DBS Disclosure (or equivalent) initiated by Keele University?	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
7f If you have answered **YES to question 7e** please contact the appropriate person (as advised by Nicola Leighton) to obtain a confirmation note indicating that a DBS disclosure (or equivalent) has	

been previously initiated by Keele and that it was satisfactory. Is the confirmation note attached to this form. If you have answered **NO to question 7e** please contact the appropriate person (as advised by Nicola Leighton) immediately to arrange for a DBS disclosure (or equivalent) to be applied for. You will still be able to apply for ethical approval in parallel to applying for a DBS disclosure. However, your project will not be approved by the ERP until you have forwarded the confirmation note from Human Resources indicating that DBS disclosure has been undertaken and is satisfactory. I confirm the relevant person has been contacted and a DBS disclosure (or equivalent) has been initiated.	
8. Will the study involve participants who are unable to give valid (informed) consent (e.g. children and adults lacking mental capacity)? **If YES**, what procedures will be in place to ensure that informed consent is obtained, where appropriate, from third parties (e.g. parents or carers)? And what procedures will be in place (if any) to give the participants an opportunity to have their objections recognised and respected?	NO (delete as appropriate)
9. Does the investigation involve observing participants unawares? **If YES**, what efforts will be made to respect their privacy, values and well-being?	NO (delete as appropriate)
10. Will the confidentiality of participants be maintained? **If NOT**, please give rationale: The research involves collecting qualitative data. The data that is collected from participants will be used as data to inform the research, and therefore will not be kept confidential. However, the data that is collected will be anonymised in order to be used within the research and every care will be taken to ensure that participants' identities are kept confidential. All participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. All of the collected data will be stored on a password-protected computer and deleted after 5 years. The interview content is highly unlikely to inadvertently reveal identities although participants will be briefed about this minimal risk. The conversation will be around participants' views and experiences of academic writing. **If YES**, how?	NO (delete as appropriate)
11. Will participants require any support to take part in the research (eg. disability support, interpreter)? **If YES**, what sort of support is required and how will it be delivered?	NO (delete as appropriate)

(PROCEDURES)

12. Does the research involve people being investigated for a condition or disorder which has received medical, psychiatric, clinical psychological or similar attention? **If YES**, please give details:	NO (delete as appropriate)

13. Are drugs, placebos or other substances (eg food substances, vitamins) to be administered to participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind? **If YES**, please give details and justify:	NO (delete as appropriate)
14. Will blood or other bodily fluids/tissues (including hair, nails and sebum) be obtained from participants? **If YES**, please give details and justify:	NO (delete as appropriate)
15. Is pain or more than mild discomfort likely to result from the study? **If YES**, please give details and justify:	NO (delete as appropriate)

(RESEARCH PROCESS)

16. Will participants receive any reimbursements or other payments **If YES**, please give details:	NO (delete as appropriate)
17. Does the research involve the analysis of data participants will not realise would be used by you for research purposes (e.g. confidential criminal, medical or financial records)? **If YES**, please give rationale:	NO (delete as appropriate)
18. Does the research involve the possible disclosure of confidential information to other **participants** (e.g. in focus groups)? **If YES**, please explain how this will be handled:	NO (delete as appropriate)
19. Will the researchers de-brief participants to ensure that they understand the nature of the research and to monitor possible misconceptions or negative effects? **IF YES**, how will this be done? As with any experiential matters, there is a small possibility that discussion of academic writing experiences could be a sensitive issue for some students, at the end of the interview all participants will be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research process at any point and without giving any reason. I will ask participants if they are happy and comfortable for me to still use the interview transcripts in my research, and will send a follow up email a few days later as a final check to ensure that they are still happy and comfortable for the interview transcripts to be used in my research. **If NO**, please explain why not:	YES (delete as appropriate)
20. Are there any <u>other</u> ethical issues that you think might be raised by the research? **If YES**, please give details:	NO (delete as appropriate)

(Health & Safety)

21. Does the project have any health & safety implications for the researcher?	NO

If YES, please outline the arrangements which are in place to manage these risks:	(delete as appropriate)
FOR STAFF ONLY **22. Does your research involve travel overseas?**	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
If YES, Have you consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
Have you completed and submitted the risk assessment form? Available from http://www.keele.ac.uk/finance/insurance/travelinsurance/travellingoverseas-policyriskassessment/	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
FOR STUDENTS ONLY **23. Will any research take place outside the UK?**	NO (delete as appropriate)
If YES **For home students** - have you consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
For international students - have you also sought advice/guidance from the Foreign Office (or equivalent body) of your country?	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)
For all students - will you be visiting any areas for which particular risks have been identified or for which the advice given is not to travel to this area?	YES / NO (delete as appropriate)

If YES
   (a) Please give details
 	
   (b) Please outline the arrangements in place to manage these risks.	

24. What insurance arrangements are in place? (Please contact Alan Slater on 01782 733525 to ascertain if you will be covered by University Insurance)	University Insurance / Personal Insurance (delete as appropriate)

SECTION D (to be completed by all applicants)

Please complete the checklist below to indicate the version number and date of any supporting documents included with this application.

Document(s)	Version Number	Date
Summary Proposal	**V2**	**13th August 2014**
Letter of Invitation(s)	**V2**	**13th August 2014**
Information Sheet(s)	**V2**	**13th August 2014**
Consent Form(s)	**V2**	**13th August 2014**
Consent Form(s) for use of quotes	**V2**	**13th August 2014**
Questionnaire(s)		
Interview Topic Guide(s)	**V2**	**13th August 2014**

Signatures	Signatures
Principal Investigator / Research Student: I understand that I must comply with the University's regulations and other applicable codes of ethics at all times. …V. Aiken……….…… **Principal Investigator / Research Student*** ……13th August 2014…………….. Date *please delete as appropriate	The following permissions must be obtained before this form is submitted: - for **staff who are members of a research institute**, the signature of your Research Institute Director (or, for RI Social Sciences, Research Centre Head); - for **staff who are NOT members of a research institute**, the signature of your Head of School (of, if not in a School, other line manager) - for **postgraduate research students**, the signature of your lead supervisor. I have read this application and confirm that:- • The academic and/or scientific quality of the application is satisfactory. • Arrangements are in place for the management and governance of this project ……………………………………………………………………… **Research Institute Director / Research Centre Head / Supervisor / Head of School / Other Line Manager** ………………………… Date *please delete as appropriate

Please ensure when submitting your proposal that you have provided a hard copy and e-mailed a copy of <u>all</u> the documentation to the relevant administrator:-

Applicants who have already obtained ethics approval from a separate committee should forward documentation to
Nicola Leighton, University Research Ethics Committee Administrator, Research & Enterprise Services, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, e-mail n.leighton@keele.ac.uk, telephone 01782 733306.

Applications which require approval by an University Ethical Review Panel should forward documentation to Nicola Leighton, Research & Enterprise Services, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, e-mail uso.erps@keele.ac.uk, telephone 01782 733306.

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Code of good research practice http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchgovernance/ and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study. **This includes providing appropriate information sheets and consent forms, and ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data.** Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the Research Institute Director/Supervisor and may require a new application for ethics approval.

This form was developed from the Ethics application forms used within Humanities and Social Sciences with kind permission from the HUMSS Research Ethics Committee.

SECTION E

Information regarding the completion of the ethical review panel application form
Section A – To be completed by all applicants.
Section B – To be completed by applicants who have already obtained Ethics Approval from a separate committee.
Section C – To be completed by applicants requiring approval from a University Ethical Review Panel
Section D – To be completed by all applicants.

PLEASE NOTE: Ethics Approval for Research Projects
All projects involving human research participants/subjects and/or data about identifiable individuals, need to be approved by an ethics committee before the fieldwork for projects can commence. The University has established Ethical Review Panels to review proposed research projects to be undertaken by staff and postgraduate research students. The information below provides more details about the role of these panels and the documents that need to be submitted to support the review process.

----

1. If your project has already been approved by a recognised ethics committee (for example, an NHS research ethics committee), the following documentation should be sent directly to the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee, C/o Nicola Leighton, University Research Ethics Committee Administrator, Research & Enterprise Services, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, e-mail n.leighton@keele.ac.uk, telephone 01782 733306.
   - A completed and signed ethical review application form (Sections A, B and D) accompanied by an electronic copy;
   - Evidence of prior ethics approval from the hosting institution.

2. If your project requires approval by a University Ethical Review Panel, the following documentation should be sent directly to Nicola Leighton, Research & Enterprise Services, Dorothy Hodgkin Building, e-mail uso.erps@keele.ac.uk, telephone 01782 733306
   - A completed and signed ethical review application form (Sections A, C and D) accompanied by an electronic copy of the application form and relevant documentation. An application cannot be considered until a signed copy is received and also by an electronic copy;
   - A summarised project proposal, **NO MORE THAN** two sides of A4 paper;
     And, if they are applicable given the study's design and approaches,
   - A letter of invitation for participants;
   - An information sheet which should normally include following sections: invitation paragraph; the purpose of the study; why the participant has been chosen; what will happen to participants if they take part; a discussion of the possible disadvantages, risks and benefits of taking part; the procedures for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, if any; the proposed use of the research findings; and contact details of the principal investigator plus details of additional support agencies (if necessary);
   - A copy of the participant consent form;
   - Copies of any questionnaire, interview schedules or topic guides.

3. The review will be undertaken at the next available ethical review panel meeting. Please access http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchgovernance/researchethics/ for a list of meeting dates and submission deadlines. Following the review process you will be informed of the panel's decision which will be either:
   - Study approved;
   - Study approved subject to clarification of issues, modification of design or provision of additional information which will be itemised in the letter of response;
   - Study rejected with supporting reasons.

4. If ethical approval is not granted, applicants have the right of appeal to the University's Research Ethics Committee.

5. Correspondence informing applicants of the outcome of the panel's decision will be copied to the relevant Research
   Administrators. It is the responsibility of applicants to keep their respective Institutes informed of their research activities
   for the purposes of research governance.

Appendix P: Interview schedule (substantive study)

Interview Prompts

Opening Questions:

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

Can you start by giving a quick summary of the decisions you made in the run up to starting at University?

Was going to University an expected part of your life?

And can you tell me about your course, what you are studying, what year you are in?

Do you enjoy studying those subjects?

What do you like about studying those subjects?

What don't you like about studying those subjects?

Transitional Questions

So what modules have you covered to date? (per discipline)

Which modules were most interesting? Why do you think that was?

What sorts of assessments have you had to do as part of the modules you've studied?

How many of these are based on a written format?

Is there much variation across the format of the written assignments that you have to produce as part of your course?

Do you notice a difference between the two subjects you study? (if relevant)

Do you like the variation?

Questions relating to writing

How much academic writing would you say is part of your degree study?

How important is writing within your degree?

Is writing something that you enjoy?

How would you describe your approaches to academic writing?

What are your strengths in academic writing?

What are your weaknesses?

What do you find most satisfying or rewarding about academic writing?

What is most challenging about it?

What emotions would you associate with essay writing?

What sort of feelings are provoked when you receive feedback for one of your essays?

What do you do or think of when you get a mark you are happy with?

What do you do or think of when you get a mark you are unhappy with?

When you are writing, how would you like to sound to the reader?

When you are writing, how much authority do you feel you have over the topic you are writing about?

How does that make you feel?

To what extent do you find writing a creative process? Why so?

To what extent do you find writing a prescriptive process? Why so?

What sort of written work do you like doing the best?

What is it about that sort of written work that you enjoy doing?

What sort of written work do you like the least?

What is it that makes that sort of work less enjoyable for you?

Are you expected to write in lots of different ways?

What are the different types of writing that you have to do?

Do you like having that variety? Why so?

On navigating support and guidance

Where would you be most likely to go to if you wanted help with your academic writing?

Why would this be the most likely source of help?

Would you seek guidance from anywhere else?

Thinking of advice that you have been given about writing in the past…

Where was this from (i.e. academic member of staff, study skills staff, friends, relatives, study skills book or online discussion room)?

In what ways, if any, did you benefit from this type of support?
Did this leave you with any unanswered questions? If so, what were they?

How else would you like to see academic writing supported?

Final Questions

Has your view of academic writing changed since starting University? If so, why do you think that is the case?

Do you think that your own views are commonplace amongst other students?

All things considered, is there anything you would like to add relating your experiences and views of academic writing?

Appendix Q: Coding framework

- Theoretical interests (deriving from literature and connected to RQs)
- Theoretical interests (derived from professional practice but connected to RQs)
- Salient in the text itself

Risk	Anxiety	Playing it safe	High stakes	High cost
Confidence	Power	Identity	Decoding/course switching	Sources of help
Deficit	Game-playing	Positive staff relations	Positive writing experiences	

Pseudonym:	
Risk	
Anxiety	
Playing it safe	
High Stakes	
High cost	
Confidence	
Power	
Identity	
Decoding and course switching	
Deficit	
Game-playing	
Positive staff relations	
Positive writing experiences	
Sources of help	

Appendix R: Data into coded texts

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Appendix S: Abstract themes from coded texts

Risk	Getting it wrong
	Harsh markers
	Collusion
	Risk as a positive/privilege
	Serendipity
	Letting down family
	Not getting a job
Anxiety	Getting it wrong
	Groups of people (anxiety and collusion)
	Not enough help
	Achieving
	Pressures
	Futures
Playing it safe	Dealing with uncertainties
	Trying to get it right (and what they are looking for)
	Knowing what you are doing
	Getting the grade
High Stakes	Attainment
	Careers
	Writing as central to success
	Degree as a gateway
	Access to jobs
	Doing well
	Permanency
High cost	Emotional costs
	Investment
	Debt
	Right grades
Confidence	Creativity
	Positive risks
	Having a go
	Writing as a process
	Putting in effort (and time)
	Talking to others /asking for help
	Enjoying the challenge
Power	Staff as gatekeepers
	Harsh marking
	Staff as harsh
	Variance across staff and inconsistencies
Identity	Effort
	Failing
	Passion
	Emerging professional identities
	Academic treadmill
	Achievement
	Selling out

Decoding/Course-switching	Discipline distinction
	Inconsistencies in lecturer expectations
	Course switching at the level of the individual lecturer
Deficit	Grammar and spelling
	HE student status
	Assumptions and expectations
	Being left behind
	Independent learning
Game-playing	Hitting points
	Interpreting advice
	Working with assessment guidance/grids
	Producing what they want to see
	Every man for himself (competition)
	Factoring inconsistencies in staff
	Compliance
	Responsibilities and blame
Positive staff relations	Helpfulness
	Personal tutors
	feedback
Positive writing experiences	Researching
	Writing as creation
	Writing as discovery
	Dissertation
	Real world relevance
	Writing identity
	Being on a roll
Sources of support	Familiarity
	Friends
	Family

Appendix T: Refining Abstract Themes

Risk	Getting it wrong Harsh markers Collusion Serendipity Letting down family Not getting a job	Getting it wrong Concerns and anxieties Living up to expectations
Anxiety	Getting it wrong Groups of people (anxiety and collusion) Not enough help Achieving Pressures Futures	
High Stakes	Attainment Careers Writing as central to success Degree as a gateway Access to jobs Doing well Permanency	Futurity Percieved implications and cost Subjectivities Pressures
High cost	Emotional costs Investment Debt Right grades	
Identity	Effort Failing Passion Emerging professional identities Academic treadmill Achievement Selling out	
Power	Staff as gatekeepers Harsh marking Staff as harsh Variance across staff and inconsistencies	Getting to the grades Interpersonal strategies Serendipity Power relationships Competition Compliance
Game-playing	Hitting points Interpreting advice Working with assessment guidance/grids Producing what they want to see 'Every man for himself' Factoring inconsistencies in staff Responsibilities and blame	

Decoding/Course-switching	Discipline distinction Inconsistencies in lecturer expectations Course switching at the level of the individual lecturer	
Deficit	Grammar and spelling HE student status Assumptions and expectations Being left behind Independent learning	
Playing it safe	Dealing with uncertainties Trying to get it right (and what they are looking for) Knowing what you are doing Getting the grade	
Confidence	Creativity Positive risks Having a go Writing as a process Putting in effort (and time) Talking to others /asking for help Enjoying the challenge	Writing 'on a roll' Risk as positive Risk as a privilege Wider support
Positive staff relations	Helpfulness Personal tutors feedback	
Positive writing experiences	Risk as a positive/privilege Researching Writing as creation Writing as discovery Dissertation Real world relevance Writing identity Being on a roll	
Sources of support	Familiarity Friends Family	

Appendix U: Constructing networks

Organising Themes	Global Themes
Getting it wrong Concerns and anxieties Living up to expectations	Writing is right or wrong
Futurity Perceived implications and cost Subjectivities Pressures	Writing is linked to futures
Getting to the grades Interpersonal strategies Serendipity Power relationships Competition Compliance	Writing is a game
Writing 'on a roll' Risk as positive Risk as a privilege Wider support	Writing is transformative

Appendix V: Writing themes grid (network analysis)

Global Writing Theme	Abstract writing themes from positive codes	Abstract writing Themes from negative codes	Positive Codes	Negative Codes
Writing Authenticity	Writing feels: Enabled, empowered, purposeful, agency	Writing feels: Compromised, controlled, meaningless, restricted	Researching, transferable skills, emerging professional identities, creativity, research	Having to write what is expected of you, There is one notional 'right' answer Feels like jumping through hoops
Writing Efficacy	When writing, one feels: Equipped, skilled, experienced, certain	When writing, one feels: Uncontrolled, uninformed, unrehearsed, Uncertain	Tried and test strategies Time management skills Good marks received – positive experiences of writing Well-researched	Negative experiences such as past failures or low marks, Inconsistencies in writing help and guidance on assignments, Inconsistencies in marking (because inconsistencies rely on luck – out of your control)
Writing Relationships	Writing relationships are Supportive, collaborative, useful Relationships indicate that writing is independent	Writing relationships are: Unsupportive, competitive, distant, Relationships indicate that writing is isolating	Family and friends as useful proof readers Peers as study buddies Staff as helpful/study as independent	Lack of informal points of support, competitive relationship with peers, Staff as unhelpful or distant – feeling as if you are on your own

Appendix W: Refining using Nvivo

Refining themes using Nvivo

Name	Sources	Refere...^
▼ ● Negative Writing relation…	0	0
● Writing is isolating	4	6
● Distant	7	10
● Unsupportive	8	21
● Competitive	9	29
▼ ● Positive Writing Relations…	0	0
● Collaborative	2	7
● Useful	8	14
● Writing is independent	10	26
● Supportive	13	34
▼ ● Writer Authenticity	0	0
● Empowering	2	2
▶ ● Purposeful	6	11
● Agential	6	14
● Enabling	8	17
▼ ● Writer Inauthenticity	0	0
● Meaningless	6	11
● Compromising	8	16
● Restrictive	12	18
● Controlled	13	27
▼ ● Writing Efficacy	0	0
● Experienced	7	16
● Certain	12	30
● Equipped and skilled	14	36
▼ ● Writing Inefficacy	0	0
● Uninformed	7	10
● Unrehearsed	9	19
● Uncertain	12	37
● Uncontrolled	12	52

Appendix X: Pilot Study Transcripts

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Appendix Y: Substantive Study Transcripts

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