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Crucial Connections: an Exploration of Critical Thinking and Scholarly Writing

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Abstract

Academic writing in the context of producing quality research articles is something which all academics engage in and there is evidence of increased attention to supporting the development of the writing and subsequent output of academics and research students. However, while scholarly writing is learnt in complex ways, critical thinking is an intrinsic part of such writing. In practice the teaching of critical thinking is difficult and there is a lack of discussion about what it means within the context of the writing process. Critical thinking can only be acquired with practice and this study describes a pedagogic intervention with a group of academic staff to support the participants not only to explore critical thinking in their own writing, but to consider in depth how they would apply this learning to their work with students in higher education. An exploratory model is proposed for the teaching of scholarly writing.
Discussion Outline

**Context** - scholarly writing in the context of producing quality research journal articles for academics; Aim of the module was to improve their understanding of the role of critical thinking and reading in the academic writing process.

**Rationale** - lack of discussion about what critical thinking means within the context of the scholarly writing process.

**Study** – 2010/11 Pedagogic intervention [action research approach] with a group of 20 interdisciplinary academic staff to support them not only to explore critical thinking in their own writing, but to consider in depth how they would apply this learning to their work with students in higher education.

**Findings** - Data suggests that the pedagogic intervention resulted in greater confidence in terms of participants’ critical writing skills and also supported them to help their students in the academic writing process.
What was the problem?
What was the problem?

Advanced Academic Literacy

(Stacey & Granville, 2009, p. 327)
What was the problem?

Scholarly Writing

• Writing is often seen as a problem for the education of researchers in doctoral degree programmes (Aitchison & Lee, 2006)

• Indeed it is acknowledged as a problem in most undergraduate and postgraduate programmes

• There is an absence of a systematic pedagogy for writing and in the UK this has led to an over reliance on clinical intervention by writing advisers

• One of the aims of this module is to support academic writing development
Inquiry Learning Model

read, write,
Towards a solution…

- So what pedagogic strategies can best assist in developing AAL?
  - socratic pedagogy
An exploratory model is proposed for critical academic writing encompassing a series of scaffolded in-class activities, virtual peer learning, and blended tutor feedback – culminating in the publication and dissemination of individual practice-based educational research.
Exploratory Model of Critical Academic Writing

1. In-class activities
   - Blend of physical and virtual
   - Critical thinking skills applied to practice and student learning

2. Virtual Peer Learning Sets
   - Online Journal Club

3. Support Tutor Formative Feedback
   - Research ideas
   - Close Reading
   - Reading texts inter-textually
   - Journal paper structure
   - Final drafting

4. Cross Programme Dissemination
   - New online Journal: IJAP
   - Graduate Student Conference

5. Resources

6. Participant's Practice
   - Nature of the blended activities
Scaffolded in-class activities

The Process

• Dialogues - what is meant by critical thinking?
• Critical Reading
• Key Elements of Academic Writing
• Peer Critique
Dialogues: Becoming Critical
Dialogues: Close Reading
Dialogues: Critical Reading

At the end of a chapter or paper:

1. Sketch a simple outline of the key arguments or ideas
2. What are the authors saying that has relevance to my work?
3. How convincing is what the authors are saying?
4. Write one or two sentences about the position of the author or authors
5. What use can I make of it?
Dialogues: Writing a Journal Article

We all write – but the experience of writing a research paper is different and in writing a journal article, there are specific writing demands that will challenge all of us:

• Expected level of quality
• Understanding the conventions of the discipline
• Due date means that we must think out a schedule – getting reading material, taking notes and thinking and rethinking about your topic, doing research.
• Writing itself takes time because you have to read, research, think, compose, revise
Scaffolded in-class activities

Key Elements (Adapted from Crème & Lea, 2003)

- Developing an argument
- Linking theory and practice
- Drawing a conclusion
- Analysing
- Being Critical
- Developing a central idea
- Processing Information
- Incorporating Facts
- Correct Terminology
- Logical Order
- Use of evidence to support an argument
- Use of primary texts
- Use of quotation
- Drawing on personal experience
- Expressing own opinions
- Using personal interpretation
Reading texts inter-textually

How do we assess the texts of other scholars?

A suggested way is by asking such questions as:

• What is the argument?
• What aspect of x is spoken about in this article?
• From what position?
• Using what evidence?
• What claims are made?
• How adequate are they (blank spots and blind spots)?
Reading texts inter-textually

Responding to Texts

- Do you agree or disagree with the information?
- Is it significant information?
- Does it relate to other things you have read? If so, how does it relate?
- Does it offer more detail?
- Does it offer new insights?
- Can you identify a gap into which your work will fit?

Approach your reading as an activity that demands and commands your attention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the argument?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What aspects of teaching/learning are spoken about in this article?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From what position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using what evidence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What claims are made?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How adequate are they (blank spots and blind spots)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Online Journal Club

Please feel free to add your queries in here and the module tutors will aim to respond within one working day.

- Technical or Administrative Queries (3 Messages)

If you have any questions about using Webcourses on this module, or any issues requiring clarification on the module itself, please post it here.

- Online Journal Club
  - Final Learning from Articles (11 Messages)
    - Collation of groups' in-class discussions on 16/1/11
  - Group 2: Fighter Writers! (15 Messages)
    - Members: Eileen McPartland; Fiachra O'Cuinneagain; Attracta O'Regan; Mary Upton
  - Group 3: Please choose a name for your group! (2 Messages)
    - Members: Stephen Best; Martin Duff; Liz Farrell; Rachael Hession
  - Group 4: The Creators! (13 Messages)
    - Members: Alan Farrell; Kathleen Hughes; Ita Kennedy; Fiachra McDonnell; Rory O'Boyle
  - Group 1: The Deconstruction Bunch (12 Messages)
    - Members: Mark Glynn; Bruce Carolan; Peter Weadack; Andrew Stuart

Crucial connections...
Virtual Peer Learning Sets

Use this online space to upload your latest draft work on your journal paper for your agreed peer to provide valuable feedback before your final submission. Please contact the appropriate group tutor [Marian for MA and Rosin for MSc]

- Eileen McPartland & Ita Kennelly [Peer Review Space] (15 Messages)
- Alan Farrell & Martin Duff [Peer Review Space] (12 Messages)
- Rachael Hession & Stephen Best [Peer Review Space] (11 Messages)
- Rory O'Boyle, Mary Upton & Attracta O'Regan [Peer Review Space] (12 Messages)
- Mark Glynn, Peter Weadack & Bruce Carolan [Peer Review Space] (14 Messages)
- Kathleen Hughes & Fiachra O'Cuirneagain [Peer Review Space] (9 Messages)
- Andrew Stuart & Fiachra McDonnell [Peer Review Space] (14 Messages)
Academic Staff evaluate the module
Questions?
References