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Is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art students' practice?

Thesis

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Is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art students' practice?

Doctorate in Education

31 January 2012

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Any articles after page 218

Acknowledgments

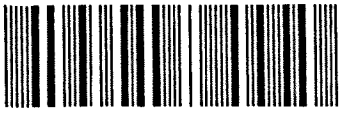*Dedicated to Evelyn
with my love*

Contents

Contents (continued)

Is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art students' practice?

Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between art students' academic work and arts practice focusing on: the function of academic writing; the space for the author's identity; and, whether dichotomies in the production of academic text and development of creative visual work preclude academic writing from being the most effective complementary mode of communication alongside visual arts practice.

Using semi-structured interviews as a primary data source, I explored the perspectives of nine undergraduate student volunteers. I used data from the interviews and multiple data sources emerging from them, such as examples of written and visual arts work, informal and email exchanges, to build qualitative case studies addressing three research questions: What is the function of academic writing in a higher education art and design context?; In what kinds of ways does the students' prior educational experience impact on their ability to engage with academic writing in their course?; and, Does academic writing enable art and design students to link theory and practice? During the study another question emerged: Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing? Here I looked at alternative models of assessment currently offered at five UK art and design institutions/faculties to find evidence of their efficacy in the context of my research questions.

Findings suggest academic writing is often ineffective in engaging students with contextual studies and theory. They tend not to link this to creative practice and resent the time spent away from the art studio. Tensions in the power relations between students and tutors often force students to write what is expected, compromising their identities within, and ownership of, the work. Non-traditional students (those defined as: the first generation of their family to participate in higher education; living in areas of social deprivation, or belonging to lower socio-economic groups) sometimes lack the cultural capital and prior experience to engage fully in academic writing. They feel there is no place for their identity in academic discourse. This is fundamentally opposed to art and design practice, where identity is often central to the development of creative work. Different forms of writing may be more appropriate complementary modes of communication within art and design than traditional academic writing, and in particular those which enable the writer to explore, celebrate and situate their identities in relation to wider historical and contextual influences in art and design. In addition to this, the potential and significance of multimodality should be considered in the 21st century, where images, film, typography and sensory information can enrich the communication of ideas and concepts, as well as being a familiar part of our everyday lives. These offer opportunities for alternative modes of assessment, which are more creative and equitable, particularly in art and design, but potentially in other disciplines.

Chapter One – Introduction:

'It's not a proper degree, 'cause it's in Art'

I was the first person in my family to get a degree, and this was one response from a member of my family 'It's not a proper degree, 'cause it's in Art.' At the time I qualified there had already been significant changes in art and design education, which placed it within a recognized academic framework (Kill 2006), but the perception of arts practice as being separate from any kind of academic or theoretical grounding has been hard to shake off. As part of the process to bring art and design education in line with undergraduate qualifications in other subject areas, complementary studies were introduced to the art and design curriculum. Academic writing in the form of essays, leading up to the production of a dissertation, was adopted as being the most obvious way to evidence the intellectual engagement expected from degree level study.

> Such writing institutionally labelled as the 'essay', is at the centre of practice in the Social Sciences/Humanities (Liberal Arts) but, surprisingly perhaps, is also referred to as a key assessment tool in subjects such as Medicine, Dentistry, Sciences, Law, Languages, Creative Arts and Education, as well as in the increasing numbers of inter- and multidisciplinary courses (see Dearing 1997, Report 2, table 3:1)
>
> (Lillis 2001:20)

Since I began this research, I have changed and refined my research questions. Originally I had intended to look at students' informal literacy practices, to determine the potential they may have to improve their formal

academic writing. It took me a while to realise that this approach was seeking to maintain and support current practice in academic writing by attempting to develop ideas that would help students to acquire the skills to engage with academic writing through the essay and the dissertation. What I had proposed was to engage students in a systematic deconstruction of one or more modes of writing to enable them to reconstruct a model that would be acceptable to the academy. Within that model, the analysis of texts from a strong understanding of linguistics would have been essential and this is reflected in my methodological literature review. There came a turning point in my research when I realized that my true interest was in challenging rather than maintaining that dominant model of academic writing. My study straddles two broad areas: language and literacy; and teaching and learning.

In this thesis I challenge the model of traditional academic writing as the most appropriate complement to students' art and design practice, and consider alternative methods of evidencing deep, intellectual exploration of art and design, as being equally effective and more inclusive. Appendix 1 (see page 237) is an extract from the study guide for students within my own institution, the site of the research. The attributes, characteristics and requirements of academic writing differ between institutions, and between accepted frameworks for referencing adopted by particular institutions. Within this thesis, my point of reference in discussing academic writing that specifically relates to the participants in my research will be the requirements laid out in this study guide. Within the literature, and more generally across

both institutions and subject areas, I discuss issues surrounding what Lillis (2001) describes as 'essayist literacy', an established practice in academic writing, which assumes that students will bring cultural and linguistic capital to their learning. This marginalizes students who are least familiar with required academic conventions due to their prior social and educational experiences and, she suggests, is a covert political act to maintain existing power relations in education. In the context of an increasing diversity within the student population, Lillis proposes re-thinking the practice of academic writing, not just in art and design, but more broadly. Her research and that of other researchers whose work I discuss further in Chapter Two forms the basis of my own inquiry. By 'practice' in the context of the question, I mean the process through which artists develop and make creative visual pieces.

Traditionally, studio practice tends to aim to simulate the kind of environment in which a professional working artist would work. Self-employment or work within small to medium size enterprises (SMEs) characterizes the experience of the majority of practitioners within the creative industries. Activity within the studio is project-based, and as the student progresses through their pre-degree courses through to undergraduate study, there is an expectation that their 'projects' would be increasingly self-initiated and undertaken with a greater degree of independence. The role of a tutor in the early stages, is to teach practical skills in specific techniques and processes working with materials appropriate to the subject discipline, which might be fashion design or architecture for example. The tutor would also support student learning in research and design development, and facilitate the process

of the production of creative work. Later in the student's career the role

develops into a mentoring role, with the tutor assuming the role of critical

friend. This relationship is not always unproblematic, and tensions occur

when the tutor may make judgments on the student's create work which,

it could be argued, may be subject to their personal prejudices around the

legitimacy of the student's work in the context of arts practice. Within this

study, I have become aware of such tensions occurring in the studio work

of the participants in my research. As a result, they may have felt pressured

to accommodate the views of the tutor, and compromise their own voice

in their creativity within studio practice, or accept that their results at

assessment may suffer if they choose to pursue a line of enquiry which is

not endorsed by the tutor.

The four main key issues, which underpin the context of my work, are

broadly categorized as: historical developments in art and design education,

specifically the adoption of traditional academic practices; the conception

of traditional academic writing as non-inclusive; the current concerns

surrounding the integration of studio practice and critical intellectual

engagement with art and design through discourse, and; the challenge to

the historical dominance of the written word in the context of technological

advances and cultural practices.

By engaging in an in-depth critical examination of how these factors impact

on art and design education, through the experiences of a small group of

student participants, I wanted to see whether there may be any potential for:

improving the experience of writing for students; creating explicit links to their

arts practice, and; providing a more meaningful and empowering model for writing, which takes a greater account of social diversity. From this, I devised the following three research questions, aligned to the four key issues, to which I will refer in the analysis of the data in Chapter Five. They are:

1.   What is the function of academic writing in a higher education art and design context?

2.   In what kinds of ways does the students' prior educational experience impact on their ability to engage with academic writing in their course?

3.   Does academic writing enable art and design students to link theory and practice?

Another question emerged in the course of the research (see Chapter Six for analysis of data):

4   Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing?

This introductory chapter provides the reader with some background in the form of a brief overview of the four key issues that underpin the research, which will be explored in more depth through the literature in Chapter Two. In the following section I interweave aspects of my own experience in the context of the research, in acknowledgement of having a personal agenda which links strongly to my aim to provide a convincing argument for change.

My professional motivation for undertaking this research stems from my experience of teaching communication skills in a specialist art and design

institution. The practice of evidencing academic engagement with the historical and contextual background to art and design through formal academic writing was introduced when visual arts disciplines became degree level qualifications. As a tutor my overwhelming impression has been that students are reluctant to write, lack confidence in writing and do not appear to have been taught the process. Worse than this the motivation to overcome this is absent as many fail to see the relevance of their academic work to their arts practice. The literature I examine in Chapter Two indicates that this phenomenon is widely acknowledged in art and design education in the UK and internationally. I view the failure to make meaningful connections between historical and contemporary arts practice, as a complement to the development of their own arts practice, to be the greatest barrier to students' overall personal and professional success and satisfaction at degree level. This is supported by my research and has led me to question whether academic writing is the most appropriate means through which to make those links.

Personal motivation for the research has its roots in my own feelings of intellectual inadequacy, which was fuelled by the education system of the time. As a grammar school student I had been expected to aspire to study subjects widely recognized as academic, preferably at a highly respected university. My desire to pursue a career in art and design placed me quite firmly in the 'also ran' category in respect of academic achievement, and this feeling followed me through to degree and beyond. After fifteen years in business as a graphic designer I sought, and gained, the opportunity to

teach in an art and design institution. With no formal teaching qualifications I was concerned that although I had the subject skills, I was unable to gauge whether I was an effective tutor, so I chose to study education at Masters level. During this period I became aware of theoretical, social and contextual issues surrounding teaching and learning, which enabled me to begin to make sense of my own experience, and gave me a broader understanding of my students' needs and approaches to learning. My grammar school education, and subject choices of English Literature and History in addition to Art, had provided me with a good grounding in academic writing, research skills and critical engagement, and I enjoy writing. Reflecting back I would imagine that the majority of my forty or so peers in my Foundation year at art school had comparable skills and a similar prior educational background, which would not be true of the current student groups I teach on the pre-degree courses in my own institution (183 students now on Foundation at my campus). In the academic year 2010-2011, thirty-four percent of degree students on the campus where I teach within my own institution live in low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs) as defined by the Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) Q1-very low and Q2-low (HEFCE 2007). This partially reflects the greater diversity within the student undergraduate population driven by widening participation initiatives of the previous government, the ideology of which I fully support, reflecting my current post as Access and Outreach Co-ordinator. My position as the first person in my family to study at degree level placed me in the category of non-traditional student. Harvey (2004-9) provides this definition:

> Non-traditional students are those entrants to higher education
> who have population characteristics not normally associated with
> entrants to higher education, that is, they come from social
> classes, ethnic groups or age groups that are underrepresented.

My prior educational experience equipped me with the skills to survive in an academic environment, but many of the students with whom I have worked over the past thirteen years do not come with the taught skills to cope, even when they clearly have the intellectual capacity for undergraduate study.

Lillis (2001:53) describes 'a privileged literacy practice within Western Societies constituting considerable cultural/linguistic capital' which she refers to as 'essayist literacy', which dominates formal schooling and defines higher education (HE) literacy practice. She argues that the inability to facilitate equity in access to this practice in our current education system, particularly for non-traditional students

> ... signals the need to look beyond a notion of individual confusion
> towards an institutional practice of mystery. This practice of
> mystery is ideologically inscribed in that it works against those
> least familiar with the conventions surrounding academic writing,
> limiting their participation in HE as currently configured.
>
> (Lillis 2001:53)

My selective school education groomed me for HE study. Many of the students I teach have not been taught in the same way as I was and struggle to understand what is required within an educational setting that holds the assumption that they will know how to produce academic written work. This phenomenon is not restricted to art and design, but is exacerbated by

the lack of cohesion between the theoretical and contextual elements of art

and design education and their relationship to arts practice within taught

programmes of study, which is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two.

In addition, a high percentage of art and design students are dyslexic as

compared to other disciplines (Symonds 2005; James 2003). Exley (2003)

drew on a body of literature suggesting that dyslexic students tend to prefer

visual/spacial learning styles. Exley substantiated this in her research project

in which she identified the dominant learning styles of a group of dyslexic

students in order to improve their performance and attainment in literacy

and numeracy by teaching to those learning styles. Although I am not

dyslexic I have realized, during the course of this research, how dominant

my visual learning style is. I discovered my own predisposition for visual

semiotic codes as opposed to textual, as illustrated in my categorization of

data discussed in Chapter Four.

It is important here to acknowledge that the use of the term dyslexia

to describe students or to attribute particular characteristics to them is

problematic on a number of levels. From my perspective, one significant

issue is that of definition, in terms of dyslexia being considered a disability or

a difference. Riddick (2010:8) articulates this view:

> In my mind it conjures up strengths, an alternative approach to
> learning and positive role models.

The participants in my research who have described themselves as being

dyslexic have identified personal strengths, which they feel they possess

and do not always see evident in others.

Riddick (2010) asserts that the one label of dyslexia, used in isolation, does

not sufficiently take into account the huge variations in characteristics of

the people being subjected to such labelling. She also highlights the added

complication of different groups of people requiring a definition for different

purposes, and offers the example of a genetic researcher, who might require

a definition with a high level of precision if they want a representative

sample, as opposed to a teacher who may only be looking at indicators.

Early definitions of dyslexia, which still tend to influence some less informed

perceptions, focused too strongly on dyslexia as a reading problem. Riddick

(2010:5) quotes the British Dyslexia Definition (BDA 2009):

> Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty which mainly affects
> the development of literacy and language related skills. It is
> likely to be present at birth and to be life long in its effects. It
> is characterised by difficulties with phonological processing,
> rapid naming, working memory, processing speed and the
> automatic development of skills which my not match up to an
> individual's other cognitive abilities. It tends to be resistant to
> conventional teaching methods, but its effects can be mitigated
> by appropriately specific intervention, including the application of
> information technology and supportive counselling.

It is a long quote, but highlights some, but not all, of the complexities and

although it is still open to criticism, it does acknowledge the need to draw

upon cognitive research. Riddock suggests that, in future, dyslexia will

be discussed in terms of a spectrum of characteristics, as is autism. My

interpretation of the BDA definition still holds the implication that dyslexia

is being presented as a deficit model. In terms of my own limited work

with participants in my research, their experience of being labelled as

dyslexic has been accompanied by negative educational experiences and

discrimination. I have much sympathy with the social model of disability

perspective (Cameron 2007) which argues that an extreme view would

assert that 'there is no such thing as disability, only disabling environments'

(Riddick 2010:9). Riddick informs us that this view has been contested

by disabled people for 'ignoring or underplaying the reality of the inherent

physical or cognitive difficulties they have to deal with' and suggests that the

adoption of 'an interactional model (sometimes termed a bio-psycho-social

model), which considers both the role of the environment and the individual

and the interaction between them' may be a more 'productive' way forward.

In terms of this study, I use the term 'dyslexia' in full recognition of its

problematic nature. When discussing the participants in the research, I refer to

them as being dyslexic if they selected to use the term to describe themselves

or difficulties they have in the context of experiences they have described

during our interactions. When I have discussed the numbers of students

presenting with dyslexia, I use the term to indicate self-declarations on data

collected from UCAS, the internal monitoring and diagnosis undertaken within

my own institution, and with reference to the BDA definition.

Conclusion   .

To summarise the aims of the research, my focus centres on the question

'Is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art and design

practice?' The location of my research is in the teaching and learning of

language and literacy, including visual language, in the specialist area of art and design education.

In Chapter Two, the literature review looks in more detail at: art and design education, setting the context for the study, the place of academic writing historically; current thinking around the nature of academic writing, drawing on both theory and examples of practice within art and design education; issues around inclusivity in academic writing; how academic writing contributes to students' understanding of theoretical and contextual aspects of art and design; and the changing role and emphasis on visual culture in today's society. Chapter Three examines the methodological literature considered in designing my study, and explains the process of decision-making leading up to the research design. Chapter Four describes the research design and explains the methods used. In Chapter Five, I present and analyze the data mapping this against my research questions. Chapter Six is an extension of the research in response to an additional research question which emerged during the research, 'Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with theory, more appropriate and effective than academic writing?' This new strand examines alternatives to the academic dissertation offered by some UK universities' art and design degrees. The final chapter draws together findings and makes recommendations for future practice.

I have included a few examples of visual work produced by participants in my research in a postscript to the last chapter of the thesis. At the beginning of the research I had not really considered looking at participants' visual

creative work, because my original research questions were focused solely on their written work. By the time I had made the decision to change my research questions, I had begun to be interested in their studio work. However, at this stage I was not anticipating that it might be particularly significant as data, but more useful in providing richer insights into the characters presented through my case studies. I had become interested in their stories and in representing something of their creativity. On reflection I feel I should have recognised the potential of this data to inform my research questions. It was when I was trying to identify emerging themes from interview data and informal interactions, most specifically issues surrounding the separation of theory and practice and the absence of a meaningful relationship between them, that I became more curious about their studio practice. I began to wonder if there were tacit links to theory but that participants may not be recognising them. However, by the time I reached the point at which I had managed to properly consider their creative visual work, it was too late in the course of the research to integrate it more effectively in relation to other data. For this reason, I present it with a written postscript to the story of each person involved in Chapter Seven. I offer no analysis, nor hypothesis as to the contribution it may have in addressing my research questions, but I include it as an enrichment to the case studies.

Chapter Two

Context of the research

In this chapter I propose to examine the four key issues forming the

conceptual framework for my research through an examination of the

literature that informs my thinking in addressing my research questions:

1.   What is the function of academic writing in a higher education

     art and design context?

2.   In what kinds of ways does the students' prior educational

     experience impact on their ability to engage with academic

     writing in their course?

3.   Does academic writing enable art and design students to link

     theory and practice?

And the question which emerged:

4   Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with

     theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing?

The four key issues are: historical developments in art and design education,

specifically the adoption of traditional academic practices; the conception

of traditional academic writing as non-inclusive; the current concerns

surrounding the integration of studio practice and critical intellectual

engagement with art and design through discourse, and; the challenge to

the historical dominance of the written word in the context of technological

advances and cultural practices. These are inter-related and inevitably there

are areas of crossover.

Historical developments in art and design education

Recommendations made by the National Advisory Council on Art Education in 1960 (most often, and hereafter referred to as the Coldstream Report) aimed to align art and design education to undergraduate degrees by introducing a compulsory academic element in the form of complementary studies and art history. Candlin (2001) argues that although this legitimated art education from an academic perspective, lack of specification as to what should be covered left the decision to tutors or institutions working against any notions of parity. By formally separating practice and theory, and prioritizing the studio element in an approximate 80:20 split, 'The Coldstream Report actually programmed a gulf between art theory and art practice in higher education' (Candlin 2001:4). In the majority of art and design institutions this has become conceptualized into a division between individual studio practice, and lectures and discussions, where written assignments provide evidence of understanding. Frequently there is a division in staffing too, where specialist tutors focus upon their own discipline through studio work, while different tutors teach the theoretical, historical and contextual content, often with few obvious points of reference for students to connect them.

Before 1960 art education in the form of design, sculpture and painting was based on drawing skills: anatomy, composition and perspective, with the emphasis on representational work. After the introduction of the three-year Diploma in Art and Design, complementary studies became a compulsory academic element, but as the content was left to individual

tutors or institutions there was no guarantee that art history or theory

was necessarily taught. It has been argued (Candlin 2001: Kill 2006) that

this opened up, perhaps unexpected, opportunities for the emerging

feminist movement, for example, to provide one of the main intersections

between theory and practice in art schools. It also politicized the arts, and

foregrounded historical, theoretical, social and cultural aspects of life, and

their relationship to art. Conceptual art also highlighted the relationship

of theory to practice, focusing on the context and discourse of the

production of art, refuting the notion that it was a purely visual process.

In his discussion paper, Raein (2003:1) asserts that 'methods of teaching

art and design history have been adapted unquestioningly from traditional

academia'. Research undertaken by Greenbank et al (2008) suggests that

art and design is one of a number of disciplines for which this is the case.

Although accepting that demands and approaches to writing dissertation

modules vary according to subject and student needs, they acknowledge

the possibility that existing work may influence the structure of the

modules and that:

> the inclusion of a dissertation may owe more to tradition and the
> academic status associated with the dissertation, rather than a
> well thought out rationale.
>
> Greenbank et al (2008:16)

The adoption of the dissertation within art and design degrees is still the most

commonly accepted model for the assessment of the historical, theoretical and

contextual element of the course. This is normally preceded by a number of

essays and presentations intended to enable students to acquire the confidence

and practise the skills to enable them to undertake an extended piece of writing. Examining study guides from different institutions reveals a variance in precise specification on style: examples include use of the third of first person, and use of objective language. I have included an anonymised example from my institution in Appendix 1 (p237). Within my own institution dissertation units of 15, 30, 45 and 60 credits are offered but students are encouraged to opt for the 30-credit unit (see Appendix 2, p240), with a requirement to produce between eight and ten thousand words.

In the late seventies there was a definite move to rethink the boundaries of art and art history, documented in an anthology of articles first written for the journal *Block*. Published between 1979 and 1989 *Block* initiated and responded to key debates in visual and cultural studies. Candlin (2001:6) summarizes:

> These responses contributed to a critique of 'the tired formulas
> of sensibility-plus-dates' and aimed at an understanding of art as
> a social, material and expressive practice determined by specific
> forms of production and reception. By the late seventies social
> history, institutional critique, the cultural analysis of Raymond
> Williams and Pierre Bourdieu, varieties of reception theory were all
> current, as was the work of Althusser, Foucault, Lacan.

Over the years art education has developed a stronger relationship with intellectual, social and cultural issues - though what is permitted differs from institution to institution and often within studios. This does not appear to have had much impact in bridging the divide between theory and practice. Arguably more constraining is the link to education reform, heralded in a statement following the merger of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design (NCDAD) and the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) in 1974:

in future art and design will be regarded and treated as an integral

part of higher education rather than an isolated subject area with

its own institutions, procedures and validation body

(quoted in Candlin 2001:8).

Art courses took the form of undergraduate degrees and began to be

taught in polytechnics, and later, in universities. As a consequence, more

art and design postgraduate degrees have become available, along with

the introduction of the practice-based PhD, and regulation has become

more stringent. Candlin (2001:12) draws attention to the tension between 'a

predominantly socialist commitment to integrated theory and practice' and

'Thatcherite educational reforms' but argues that:

Educational reforms are of great consequence to making art, but

this does not imply that managerial recommendations determine the

sort of art or theory that is produced, indeed at council level there is

rarely any consideration given to the specific art objects made.

She goes on to draw parallels between Coldstream inadvertently enabling

the emergence of feminism and social history in art education, and

conservative educational reform prompting the inauguration of practice-

based PhDs (in response to the demands of the Research Assessment

Exercise and university drivers for funding) as having 'created a site for the

critical re-thinking of academic practice' (Candlin 2001:12). This resonates

with the theoretical framing of my own research in questioning the

appropriateness of maintaining traditional academic practice within an art

and design context. It connects with an article by Eisner (2004) suggesting

that education might benefit from a more creative influence to its practice.

I draw upon this to begin to build a theoretical case for change to support my research.

Eisner (2004:1) begins by arguing that education has 'predicated its practices on a platform of scientifically grounded knowledge, at least as an aspiration'. His rather cynical critique of the historical positioning of education might be taken to imply that by aligning itself to science education it would assume a credibility that was perceived to be lacking in the lofty annals of academia, much as was the case for art and design. He proposes drawing from forms of thinking evoked by the arts to inform the future of what education is trying to accomplish. He suggests that the influence of psychology on education, and particularly the model of psychology as an exact science of the mind which dominated in the early part of the 20th century, resulted in the estrangement of science and the arts, and the notion of science as dependable cognitive, teachable, testable, and useful as against the arts as emotional, subjective and ornamental. Drawing from historical examples dating from the Enlightenment, Eisner argues that this vision of education, which dominated the early 20th century, has had a renaissance in recent years, with the current preoccupation with measuring outcomes, making accurate predictions and achieving results and maintaining control, suggesting that this is at the expense of inquiry, and proposes a new vision for education. Eisner quotes Sir Herbert Read, English art historian, poet and pacifist working in the middle of the last century, who argued that 'the aim of education ought to be conceived of as the preparation of artists' (Read, in Eisner, 2004:4). Artists, in this context, meaning:

individuals who have developed the ideas, the sensibilities, the skills, and the imagination to create work that is well-proportioned, skilfully executed, and imaginative, regardless of the domain in which an individual works

the term artist in this context being an accolade for a person working in any subject area. Eisner (2004:4) further asserts that:

...the distinctive forms of thinking needed to create artistically crafted work are relevant not only to what students do, they are relevant to virtually all aspects of what we do, from the design of the curricula, to the practice of teaching, to the features of the environment in which students and teachers live.

He describes six distinctive forms of thinking and how they might be applied in an educational context as an illustration to his argument briefly summarized as:

- The ability to compose relationships that satisfy a purpose, teaching students to act in the absence of rule, rely on feelings derived from critical analysis, the integration of feeling and thinking.

- The emphasis on process rather than outcomes – outcomes emerge from a process of research, analysis, exploration, development, reflection and evaluation rather than having pre-determined aims and objectives.

- Form and content are often inextricable, in the context of teaching, how we teach is as significant as what we teach.

- 'The limits of our cognition are not defined by the limits of our language.' Eisner (2004:7) quotes Dewey (1934) who states that 'the aesthetic cannot be separated from the intellectual, for the intellectual to be complete it must bear the stamp of the aesthetic'.

- 'The relationship between thinking and the material with which we

  and our students work'. Eisner (2004:8) warns of the need to design

  curricula with reference to the materials with which we make it possible

  for students to work.

- Motives for engagement. Eisner (2004:9) reminds us that motivation in

  the arts tends to come from 'aesthetic satisfactions that the work itself

  makes possible' and is related to the challenges the work presents,

  and which stimulate an appetite for learning.

Finally he highlights the need for a new vision for education for today's world

based on these distinctive forms of thinking in the arts and which, he argues,

are more likely to develop

> the ability to deal with conflicting messages, to make judgements
> in the absence of rule, to cope with ambiguity, and to frame
> imaginative solutions to the problems we face
>
> (Eisner, 2004:10)

Wood's critique of the 'culture of academic rigour' (2000:44) also

promotes the notion that a mode of working and thinking informed by

design culture enhances students' ability to adopt the creative problem-

solving approach described by Eisner (2004). Wood proposes a model

for writing that is more like 'designing for a specified client', which

positions the creation of texts firmly within the context of production. His

conception of 'rigour' is typified by rules, organisation and inflexibility, stiff

and unyielding, and he proposes that academic writing protocols should

be re-designed for design education. He traces the tensions between

Monastic truth-orientated knowledge	Crafts-guilds result-orientated knowledge
ie text-based knowledge that serves to validate and fortify belief	ie task-based knowledge that facilitates situated actions and judgements

Wood 2000:45

writing and arts practice back to the 'medieval monastic ('book') and the crafts guilds ('design studio') traditions' defining the modes of knowledge as illustrated above.

He reminds us that 'without the monastic culture of writing, designers would be less well-informed' (Wood 2000:45) but acknowledges its limitations in terms of lacking critical and strategic thinking essential for responsive task-based work in a rapidly changing world. He attributes its enduring dominance in formal education to the compatibility with the 'medieval corporate power structure which spawned the modern academics'.

> The underlying ideologies of the UK school system still reflect the values of what used to be taught exclusively to a ruling elite in which power was exchanged discursively through rhetorical claims and repudiation
>
> (Wood 2000:46)

As part of maintaining power within that ideology, knowledge must be presented as objective only to be contested through legitimate recognised sources, within a given format. There is no room for individuality or creativity, uncertainty, risk or innovation, all of which are important not only to artists' and designers' practice, but also to the wider aims of discovery.

Is traditional academic writing non-inclusive?

Wood (2000:52) describes the underlying purpose of conventional academic writing as being to 'enable the writer to celebrate his/her non-tacit knowledge of the topic and win approval from senior academicians.' He focuses on the lack of space within academic discourse for the identities of writer or reader, as well as highlighting adversarial tensions between the student writer and their reader/assessor. Wood raises fundamental issues of power, identity and equity, which I want to contextualize within my research, in acknowledgment of my own influences. The first is the issue of power explored by Fairclough (2001). Fairclough's belief in the significance of language in the production, maintenance and change of social relations of power, has helped to raise my awareness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, through the privileging of particular identities. Fairclough illustrates this by drawing on examples of how this happens in situations with which we are familiar, and with which we can identify, such as discourse with professionals in medical and educational settings. What is shocking is the realisation that you have been, and continue to feel marginalised by these exchanges, or worse, that you may be guilty of behaving in a comparably oppressive way towards others through your own tacit knowledge of power relations. In the context of my research, this persuaded me that the social relationship between tutors and students and the impact this has on students' experience of writing is a significant influence on the development of their work and perception of their identity as writers. I am reminded of negative experiences from my own education, and stories students have told me about incidents from

theirs, which have had a counter-productive effect on their learning. As an

educator, when considering the impact I would like to have on a student's

learning experiences, I would wish to engender positive feelings and

outcomes. This links to Freire (1972), another work that has contributed

towards the conceptual framing of the research, looking at discourse as

a means through which learners come to understand the world and can

position themselves relationally from a political perspective. It foregrounds

the inequalities which are perpetuated through traditionally dominant

discourses in education which Wood (2000) conceptualizes in his critique

of the culture of academic rigour. Freire sees acts of cognition rather than

transferrals of information as characterizing a liberating education, and

proposes a model of learning where tutors and students learn together,

challenging the authority of the teacher and making all participants jointly

responsible for individual personal development and intellectual growth. He

acknowledges the revolutionary nature of such a model as running counter

to the interests of those to whom he refers as the oppressors, which in the

context of my work applies to those who wish to maintain the dominant

discourses and distribution of power in education. For me, Freire offers the

ideological model of education based on mutual respect, collaboration,

experience and discovery as an aspiration. This is a useful reference point

for judging the efficacy and appropriateness of practice within my own

educational spaces. Freire's concept of education is based on, and takes

account of, the experiences of the students and shared investigation as an

enabler for empowerment. The aim of Freire's pedagogy is to create new

egalitarian relationships between people in education with a view to social

transformation and liberation, by encouraging dialogue between tutor and

student, enabling the student to challenge the status quo. The student

is not viewed as an object to be moulded, adapted and informed as the

tutor may see fit, but is an active participator in the process of education;

questioning, analyzing and challenging concepts presented, as opposed

to being a receptacle and absorbing information and being expected to

adopt the tutor's ways of viewing the world. The tutor will critically reflect

on their delivery of education and be prepared to learn from students and

be receptive to alternative standpoints. The process of conscientization

is at the centre of Freire's pedagogy. In simple terms this is characterized

as a progression from the state of acceptance of one's position in life and

the feeling of powerlessness, to a critical assessment of the factors that

come together to create a situation and an evaluation of the potential

of the individual to influence those factors and effect a change. This

resonates with the attention that Fairclough gives to the prior experiences

of individuals in highlighting the significance identity holds in helping

students to position themselves in relation to their learning, which is more

equitable as an educational practice for an increasingly diverse student

population. Fairclough reminds us of the unequal distribution of cultural

capital specifically through access to literacy, and the status and authority

conferred on those who have achieved positions in the professions of law,

medicine or education for example, with little attention paid to any social

advantages that have enabled them to do so:

> ... professional knowledge and skills act as emblems of personal
>
> achievement, mystifying social constraints on access – as well

as being membership cards for those who achieve access, and
as a means of excluding outsiders. The discourses of all these
professions, including specialist vocabularies or jargons, serve all
these functions.

(Fairclough 2001:53)

With this in mind, the removal of the identities of both writer and reader
from traditional academic discourse and the imposition of specific modes of
literacy is not only inappropriate, but, Fairclough might suggest, is a political
act to obscure inequalities and maintain existing power relations in education.

Lillis (2001:20) presents this view in her critique of 'essayist literacy'
based on its exclusivity as a socially valued practice, in which successful
participation requires significant cultural and linguistic capital. She argues
that students bring a whole range of cultural and social experiences to their
acts of meaning in academic writing, which should be foregrounded so
that students appreciate how this might be relevant to their learning. Lillis'
concern is that 'essayist literacy' limits access to non-traditional students
and implies that this is a covert political act aiming to maintain existing
power relations in education. She proposes re-thinking the practice of
academic writing taking the following points into consideration:

- the notion of language as transparent;

- the ambiguity surrounding the setting and assessing of written
  assignments;

- an examination of the identities which are privileged through existing
  practices, and which are excluded;

- that collaborative talk between student-writers and tutors can facilitate more control over making meaning and thus challenge what counts as acceptable meanings within academia; and

- how tutors and students can begin to share the same language.

In her book, Lillis (2001) provides a rich background to research into student writing in Higher Education (HE) in North America and then the UK. This has stemmed from the 'problem' of student writing as a result of the increase in the number of students, and greater social and cultural diversity within what she describes as the 'stratified social space' of HE (Lillis 2001:19). She tracks research interest first in the teaching of writing, then student texts and tutor perspectives, to the more recent interest in student-writers' perspectives on their texts. The latter is the focus of my own research interest in order to try to determine whether students feel that academic writing is an appropriate tool for a critical and intellectual examination into the practice of art and design within their curriculum. Lillis highlights the work of Ivanič, a teacher-researcher in HE, as an example of research which takes account of student-writer perspectives. She discusses issues around students removing their own identity from their writing and assuming what they consider to be a more appropriate identity within it, writing as someone else. The removal of identity is incompatible with art and design practice as Ivanič (1998:3) highlights in her use of the fine art analogy in the introduction to her book:

> The identity of an artist, and the extent to which s/he is drawing
> on the work of other artists are million-dollar questions in the
> world of fine art.

Lillis offers a critical appraisal of the practices surrounding the teaching,

setting and assessment of academic writing within HE and the relationship

this has to the student experience. Ivanič's work has a sharper focus

on identity and this, underpinned by Fairclough, persuades me of

the significance of students' prior life and educational experiences in

contributing to the development of their arts and writing practices. All three

writers are researchers into literacy, and offer insights into the theoretical

analysis of language/discourse in the construction of identity, power

relations and the importance of the social and cultural context of the

production of texts. These have helped me to make sense of my theoretical

positioning within the research as a non-linguist delving into issues

surrounding the production of texts.

In her article Burke (2008) establishes her own identity firstly as a student

on an access to HE course and later as a tutor and researcher in education,

and explains how she has come to an understanding of writing as a

social practice, with definite exclusive practices in play, resulting from the

maintenance of the dominant power relations in academia. Her work is

located in the context of the widening participation agenda, and considers

how writing practices in higher education contribute towards the exclusion

of identity. Students identified as 'non-traditional' learners are defined by

institutions through factors which include previous familial educational

background, social class or living in postcode areas of multiple deprivation.

Burke suggests that those students are defined and define themselves

as lacking in multiple forms of capital, and that this prevents them from

positioning themselves as having any kind of authority in their writing.

She questions the voices of 'authority' in writing and acknowledges that

'objectivity, rationality and keeping out the personal voice' (Burke 2008:199)

has shaped her experience of education, as it has mine. Institutional

interventions to address students' lack of confidence in writing, such as

study skills support for example, not only reinforce this activity as a deficit

model, but also position writing simply as skill or technique. Burke suggests

that this fails to offer

> spaces for the student to explore her understanding through
> processes of writing, as well as questions about her and
> others' authoritorial voices and her own positioning as the
> writer/reader/knower.
>
>   (Burke 2008:210)

It is one thing to subscribe to the ideas behind developing the conditions

for students to celebrate and develop their own identities and to have a

'voice' but quite another to put it into practice. Drawing on insights from the

Economic and Social Research Council's Teaching and Learning Research

Programme *Consulting Pupils about Teaching and Learning Project* Ruddock

and Fielding's (2006) article looked at the characteristics of schools where

commitment to participation and promoting the student voice was central.

Ruddock and Fielding (2006:219) highlight three big issues which need to be

addressed in order to develop an organizational culture where the student

voice has a place:

> power relations between teachers and students, the commitment
> to authenticity, and the principle of inclusiveness.

Rudduck and Fielding (2006:227) define authenticity as:

> the disciplined communication of genuine interest in what the
> students think and have to say... ...to be surprised by students'
> insights and capabilities and not dismissive of their thinking.

They also highlight the issue of inclusion, with particular reference to language competence, warning of the danger that unless specific opportunities are provided for all students, the student 'voice' will tend to be represented by students most capable of verbalising their ideas, who will tend to be socially confident and linguistically competent. These will typically be students who have prior experiences of the discourses of education and who have a closer social connection to tutors. Ruddock and Fielding acknowledge the limitations of the *Consulting Pupils* project in confining its study primarily to the school sector. Nevertheless, there are parallels to be drawn between its findings and insights from Fairclough (2001) regarding the maintenance of dominant ideologies, Freire (1972) in terms of a commitment to authenticity, and Burke (2008) in drawing attention to issues of inclusion/exclusion. Ivanič (1998) argues that in order to develop a voice that will be heard, a student needs to know what can be said and how it can be articulated, and will need to develop a sophisticated understanding of the discourse of higher education in order for their 'voice' to be heard. In the process she questions how much of their own identity they are able to bring to their 'voice', and how much they have to assume a false or double identity. In her case study about Rachel, Ivanič (1998:157) illustrates this drawing on her interview data:

> It is interesting that she [Rachel] refers interchangeably to 'playing
> a game' and 'playing a role': this indicates that the game of words

is inseparable from the question of who you are: discourse and identity are inextricably intertwined. It also captures the way in which the process of accommodating to readers' expectations is central to the discoursal construction of identity.

The study includes examples of Rachel consciously adjusting her content to please her tutor, and her 'internal wrangles' over having to compromise herself by writing in a certain way, and not knowing how to resist.

Although it might be argued that in terms of style, such as the acceptance of writing in the first person, there appears to be more room for the personal voice in academic writing now than previously, it is questionable how much of this personal voice actually belongs to the student writer, and how much is an assumed identity based upon what they perceive to be acceptable in the eyes of academia. Student writers have to consider their reader, anticipate the reader's response to their texts, and in respect of the power that the reader has over them in terms of assessment, carefully choose how much they will accommodate the reader's anticipated view and how much they can afford to resist it (Chase 1988). In his essay, Chase draws on three case studies to illustrate how students position themselves and their reader in the production of a written assignment. He uses the term 'accommodation' to describe how students operate within the rules of academic convention; 'opposition', where students fail to learn the conventions or behaviours which will enable them to learn; and 'resistance' which refers to deliberate rejection of the dominant ideologies. Ivanič draws upon this conception of student engagement with written assignments as a framework for her own research.

The literature I have discussed in this section represents the view that the teaching and learning which dominates conventional academic writing, is not inclusive. Chase (1988:13) reminds us that

> discourse communities are organized around the production and legitimization of particular forms of knowledge and social practices at the expense of others, and they are not ideologically innocent.

Firstly he encourages us to take a critical look at academic conventions, paying attention to the presence or absence of particular cultural values, processes and dynamics when applied to academic discourse, and whether these are emancipatory or oppressive to the student. Secondly he encourages us to critically consider pedagogical practices which focus on interactions between the student and the teacher in the production of knowledge (Freire 1972, Chase 1988).

In consideration of issues around inclusion and academic writing, there is an additional complicating factor too significant to be ignored. In art and design education there is reported to be a higher percentage of dyslexic students than in other subject areas. Difficulties experienced by dyslexic student writers may not be adequately addressed by improving teaching and learning in academic writing. A study by James (2006) acquired the full breakdown of student numbers by subject and disability from the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) for the academic year 2001/2002. This data was broken down into 160 different subjects and covered all students registered in UK institutions during the 2001-2002 academic year. These 160 subjects were grouped into 19 more general areas used by the Higher Education Academy. The report showed that 5.59% of creative

arts and design students are dyslexic, the highest percentage reported.

The James report, commissioned and published by a company producing

support for dyslexic people, could be viewed with scepticism, but the report

under-estimates figures as compared to our own. Within my own institution

the official statistics currently stand at 12%. Small discrete studies I have

undertaken with my own students groups suggest 24%. This is based on

questionnaires I have given each year group over a five-year period aimed

at finding out how confident the students feel about aspects of study, such

as researching, reading and note-taking, and written assignments. Students

have the opportunity to declare specific learning needs on their application

forms, but some are reluctant to do so in case it jeopardizes their chances of

acceptance on the course. During induction, I explain that help is available for

students with specific learning difficulties and it would be to their advantage

if we are aware of concerns they have. This often prompts students who have

not responded to the question on the application to declare learning needs

in their responses to the questionnaire. Anecdotal evidence from dyslexia

advisors in my institution suggest the figure could be much higher, some

even estimating 60%. With many students remaining undiagnosed and others

preferring not to declare dyslexia as a disability, it is virtually impossible ever

to determine the true picture, a complicating factor in the context of the

research. It is far too big an issue to deal with adequately in this thesis, and

this needs to be acknowledged. I integrate references to dyslexia into the

consideration of the impact of students' prior educational experience on their

ability to write within academic conventions in response to the overarching

question of the appropriateness of academic writing in art and design

education in reporting the findings of my research (see Chapter Seven).

The integration of studio practice and critical intellectual engagement

with art and design

The third key issue concerns the separation of theory and practice which

has characterized art and design education since the Coldstream reports

programmed the need to include a greater level of academic engagement

in line with other disciplines. Art and design tutors were not necessarily

suitably qualified to teach academic conventions, so teachers of art history

and theory were employed to deliver the academic content, and students

were taught in isolation from their studio practice.

In a wider context, Laurillard (2002) addresses deficits in teaching and

learning expertise in her book in which she advocates rethinking teaching

and learning to take greater account of new technologies. In her introduction

she suggests that many academics are employed primarily for the

knowledge they possess about their subject rather than their ability to teach,

and need to take a greater responsibility for teaching and learning.

> Teachers need to know more than their subject. They need to
> know the ways it can come to be understood, the ways it can
> be misunderstood, what counts as understanding: they need to
> know how individuals experience the subject.
>
> (Laurillard 2002:3)

This was an issue before widening participation, when the student

population were drawn from a pool of people who had been much better

prepared for the discourse of education and were less culturally diverse.

How much more acute is the problem when greater numbers of students,

already unfamiliar with the discourse, are confronted with tutors who lack

the ability to communicate their subject effectively? Additionally, within

art and design education, students are failing to make critical connections

between theory and practice, writing and making. In many cases this is

exacerbated by a lack of communication between staff teaching in the

studio and those teaching theory and contextual studies.

In 2004 two special editions of *Art Design and Communication in Higher*

Education (ADCHE) were devoted to the relationships between textual

and visual interfaces in art and design education, highlighting and

acknowledging the tensions. In their editorial introduction to these issues,

Orr et al (2004:75) suggest that in some cases art is 'a curriculum choice

that is connected to a rejection of writing as there is a desire to express

themselves through another media'. One of the themes that has emerged

from much of the research literature I have examined is that of some students'

resentment towards the academic part of the course involving written

work, which is viewed as an unwelcome deviation from their chosen course

rather than an integral part of it. Turner and Hocking (2004) advocate more

active participation between art staff and language staff in order to help

students to come to a greater understanding of the relationship between

the visual, verbal and written texts that frame their teaching and assessment

processes. Through their analysis of these texts, collected from the context

of contemporary fine art study, Turner and Hocking (2004:159) identify 'a

synergistic relationship between art and language', which they view as

central to the discipline, as against the traditional view in many parts of higher

education of language use as transparent and having a separate identity

from discipline content. However they make no mention as to how students can find a voice in this complex process and acknowledge the difficulties for students who are less familiar with disciplinary writing, such as overseas and mature students, previously mentioned in Burke (2008), and Lillis (2001). I am unconvinced that more active participation between art staff and language staff is a practical solution given the current cuts in education, and the absence of such expertise in many specialist art and design institutions.

Reporting on their research Pritchard et al (2005) examine how students conceive of the relationship between the dissertation and their practice. Their study involved students who were taught by tutors who teach both theory and practice, not always the case on art and design courses. The content is described as being delivered through 'theory days' linked to practice, ultimately leading to a dissertation related to their practice, so there is some separation. The research aimed to find out how students conceived of the relationship, and drew data from twenty-minute interviews with twenty-four students, eight from each of three course disciplines. Four categories of description emerged in the findings: in Category A, the dissertation was seen as an integral part of the students' creative practice; in Category B the dissertation was seen as relating to students' practice, but a separate constituent; in Category C students saw the dissertation as a completely separate entity from their studio practice; and in Category D, the students saw no relevance in the dissertation at all and would have preferred not to include it in their degree. I was interested in this study because of the relationship it has to my research, but I was disappointed that the authors

made no comments on apparent connections, or lack of connection,

between variations due to subject disciplines, or students' prior experiences,

particularly in respect of their stated starting point from the proposition that

learning is the social construction of knowledge and their explicit aim being to;

> answer the question of how, in their learning, art, media, and
> design students conceive of the relation between the dissertation
> and practice.
>
> (Pritchard et al, 2005:6)

Neither was there any mention as to how the students were distributed

across the categories, although they did recommend that further research

was undertaken which took account of the context of learning and students'

prior understandings as a route to greater integration of theory and practice

and more depth in understanding through primary rather than secondary

knowledge acquisition.

Concern over student competence in, and engagement with, writing in art

and design education has been explored through the *Writing Purposefully in

Art and Design (WritingPAD)* project, which began in 2002. An interim report

on the project was included in the aforementioned *ADCHE* special editions.

The project aimed 'to inform the cultures of learning in studio-based art and

design practice and to encourage the use of writing as a valid tool for the

reflective practitioner' (Edwards 2005:2). The *WritingPAD* project, though

acknowledging the issues students have with writing, seeks to maintain,

strengthen and expand the role of the written text. The main themes explored

were studio-theory-support, writing development, writing processes, the

place of the visual, writing types and assessment. The use of the referent

'purposefully' in *WritingPAD* has particular significance to the aims of the

project in terms of linking theory to practice and helping to realise the potential

of writing to inform and support their work. Literature from the *WritingPAD*

project includes case studies, research projects, position papers, propositions

and discussion papers. I have only been able to include a few within the

scope of this review. I chose those I felt represented the breadth of the project

and were most relevant to my research and, in this section, those that are

most closely related to the separation of theory and practice.

Orr and Blythman (2004) state their own position and draw on examples

from their research in a case study for *WritingPAD*, in which they propose

a challenge to the oppositional model of design and writing by using the

discourse of design to develop student writing, echoing Eisner (2004). Orr

and Blythman use the following example to reinforce parallels in process

between writing and design:

> [It is like] 'composing an epic poem, writing a concerto
>
>   (Papenek 1985)
> [It is] 'a conscious and creative communication with materials to
> achieve human effect
>   (Sharples 1999, both quoted from Orr and Blythman, 2004:2)

The first quote is referring to design and the second to writing, the

interchangeability suggesting they share common features. This suggests

that, whether writing or producing artwork, a focus on the conception of the

process might help students to make links between the practice of making

art, with which they are familiar, and the process of writing, which they find

more difficult. Orr and Blythman construct a convincing argument in support

of the analogy, drawing on several researchers who have studied the

processes of either writing or design to illustrate the internal (students' own)

and external constraints of the brief. Whether these are imposed through

an academic writing assignment or a client design brief, this challenges the

notion that either writer or designer ever starts with a blank page.

> To add to the challenges set by these constraints, in wider social
> contexts, design and writing are both expected to conform to **and
> simultaneously challenge** conventions and constraints.
>   (Orr and Blythman, 2004:3, emphasis in original)

They remind us that both outputs are qualitatively judged, placing

understanding of the criteria for success as central to the process. The

role of authorship is explored and the extent to which a writer or designer

can draw upon the ideas of others in order to produce their own creative

interpretation. They highlight the practice of discussing ideas, a common

feature of informal (conversations) and formal (through critiques) studio work

as opposed to the solitary experience that typifies student writing, which

is seen in a number of examples from the research I have looked at as well

as my own. Orr and Blythman's research reveals the social dimensions

evident when students are designing. They are happy to draw on the ideas

of others. Orr and Blythman found this was further exemplified in the way

they described their work, using all their senses to understand and articulate

their own work and that of others, whereas their descriptions of written

assignments lacked any passion. One possibility they propose is for a model

of collaborative work for writing, paralleled to studio practice, as a means to

build student confidence in writing. In this way, the reluctance of students

to voice their own thoughts and critically analyze their own experiences

within their writing, as they do in studio practice, could be addressed. This

model of learning, when applied to writing, reinforces a social practice view

of writing advocated by Lillis (2001). Orr and Blythman (2004:5) also suggest

that the use of a textual sketchbook concept, a site for experimenting with

words and generating ideas, might allow for exploration and experimentation

in writing 'to give writing the texture, physicality and colour of the artefact'.

Raein's (2003:1) discussion paper begins by reiterating that teaching

methods in art and design history have 'been adapted unquestioningly from

traditional academia.' He draws parallels between this practice, which he

describes as the process of examining elements of art using vocabulary

such as 'objective', 'detached' and often a 'one way stream of information

[even in seminars] imparted to students through a 'fundamentally intellectual

and cerebral' activity. Studio practice is conceptualised as 'active', 'doing',

'making', 'creative', 'multi-sensory' and that knowledge is created through

experience. His conception of the difference reminds me of Wood's (2000)

diagram illustrating the difference between monastic truth-orientated and

craft-guilds result-orientated modes of knowledge (see page 29). Raein

describes the division as an 'uncomfortable co-existence of two traditions

within one institution' and that the teaching of history and visual learning

style of the students is not taken into account. Raein (2003:2) suggests that

research is the common starting point but:

> Academia has demanded a tradition of detachment in the process
> of research and critical analysis while studio sees the presence of

the practitioners right at the centre of the continuum of research, analysis and synthesis.

The fundamental difference is the removal of the self, and Raein asks 'why do we demand of art and design students to place themselves [the 'I'] at the centre of the creative process yet deny them this position when it comes to reflecting upon theory or history?' (Raein 2003:2). With reference to the aims of the course, he questions what contribution this kind of practice makes to the development of the artist.

The issue of the students' own voice within their research is taken up by Lydiat (2003) from the Nottingham Trent University (NTU) School of Art and Design, who has developed a writing module specifically designed to dissolve the dichotomy between theory and practice by encouraging and enabling students to find their own voice within the context of historical/ contemporary culture. The redesigning of objectives is addressed within the specification, which states its aim as being to enable the student to produce a well-researched piece of critical writing to demonstrate their understanding of theoretical and contextual issues arising from their study of fine art. Within this framework, students are encouraged to:

- write their own experiences
- be personally reflexive, reflecting upon the ways in which their own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped their practice
- be aware of other knowledges and to understand and evaluate their own place within those knowledges both practically and theoretically

(Lydiat 2003:1)

Lydiat explains that when she began teaching Fine Art at NTU, in the early

nineties, Critical Studies was delivered by staff outside the Fine Art course

and was entirely separate, apart from the involvement of those staff in the

assessment of the final exhibition. The decision to integrate theory and

practice was taken six years later to support widening participation and

achievement, and make written research more inclusive especially for

students who were less academically confident such as mature students,

overseas students and those with dyslexia. To prepare for this transition,

staff attended workshops devised by Susan Orr (referenced on p46) which

aimed to ground staff within their own research in relation to practice,

acknowledging that they could not be the holders of all knowledge, but

could create the environment for students to explore different styles and

voices. Emphasis was placed upon what the writing was for, and focused

on skills students needed to acquire for future practice. This model was

intended to allow for, and take account of, a greater focus on investing

in the development of vocational and lifelong learning skills, and Lydiat

asserts that, despite the departure from the traditional forms of writing,

there still remains the requirement to demonstrate academic rigour. The

situating of the tutor in the role of mentor, and drawing on their own

experience of being a researcher in their own practice, rather than the

knower of all things, enables greater flexibility of choice for the student

to pursue a more individual route for their study. In her evaluation of the

success of this model, Lydiat (2003:3) states that it offers opportunities for

students to write in a way that was not possible within the old model of

analysis of existing texts.

It opens up a space of creativity and imagination. It gives them confidence in their ability to articulate their understanding theoretically and practically. It is also on-going and does not end when the dissertation is handed in.

Lydiat describes feedback from students as 'a revelation.'

They were genuinely engaged with and palpably surprised at the recognition of a shared sense of enquiry through difference, ie culture, gender, age, and in some instances, disability. It was a surprisingly empowering experience in which they felt less isolated and more socially situated within the context of their writing

(Lydiat (2003:4)

Lydiat acknowledges that allowing students to include personal experience and identity within a research context has raised a number of concerns, which include:

- appropriateness of assessment

- possibility of disadvantage to students progressing to different models of academic rigour (eg postgraduate study)

- students having to reinvent the wheel historically to position their voice

- privileging one voice over another

- linking back from level 3 to levels 1 and 2

- formal criteria fit to students writing practice/output

- special concerns over the increasing numbers of students presenting with writing difficulties in third years, specifically dyslexia and English as a second language

(Lydiat 2003:4)

Lydiat's case study introduces additional complicating factors. Perhaps the most concerning are the difficulties students demonstrated in positioning their own experience within a historical context, which is likely to have had the effect of marginalizing them. Lack of parity in the accepted models of writing between institutions is also of concern, although significant inconsistencies in practice occur within institutions.

Mayfield's (2005) study is a response to a previous *WritingPAD* proposition paper *Designers are Writers*, jointly authored by Julier & Mayfield (2004), which Mayfield (2005:1) described as 'largely an expression of our own tacit understanding based on personal experience'. Mayfield's subsequent work reflected upon assumptions they had made in their original paper.

> In particular, if "verbal articulation, and thus writing, are
> naturalised within the everyday context of the students' design
> practice" (Julier and Mayfield 2004) how come so many students
> seem to struggle with and dislike it?

Mayfield examined the extent to which students shared those views, through a series of student focus groups. She reports that the resulting data echoes findings from other researchers' work, within the *WritingPAD* group, in suggesting that students regard writing as a necessary evil, which takes precious time from the important business of creativity, voiced by some students wanting to 'get the essay out of the way to concentrate on studio projects' (Mayfield, 2005:2). She goes on to describe students' perception of writing as a 'mysterious, precise process for which they don't know the rules' which echoes Lillis' (2001)

concerns about an institutional practice of mystery. The most alarming

reported incidents in Mayfield's study suggested that there was a lack

of support and at worst no formal teaching at all, obscure or negative

feedback, all of which worked to maintain an 'exclusivity' assigned to

writing practices, which engendered feelings of inadequacy and isolation

for the students. Some students also expressed concern that emphasis

on formal academic writing fails to offer opportunities to engage in

writing practices that could be relevant to their work as arts practitioners.

The focus groups in Mayfield's study drew students from different

discipline areas and her data seemed to suggest that on one course in

particular, which aimed to integrate different forms of communication

more closely, students accepted writing as part of their studies. One was

quoted as saying 'writing is part of the artistic process' (Mayfield 2005:1)

although she adds that it is clear from other comments that it is still

perceived as a secondary in importance. She also highlights that:

> initiation of the theme, scope, goal and even personal aims of a
> piece of work seem to be internal in the case of studio projects,
> external in the case of written work.
>
> (Mayfield 2005:5)

She suggests that students are reluctant to draw on their own experience

in their written work, which she attributes to a fear of not 'getting it right'

and making fools of themselves. She feels this may be due to what she

calls 'the sense of the exclusive club rules associated with written work'

(Mayfield 2005:5). Students in Mayfield's study highlighted the isolation that

surrounded written work, with far less communication between tutors and

students, or between peer groups, over written assignments compared to interactions over studio work, and the feedback from written work was more ambiguous and less rich. In her conclusion she illustrates her conception of the difference in the student experience of studio projects as compared to written assignments as the following figure illustrates.

She questions how far the distinctions can be broken down, whether the processes can and should be merged, proposing that

> by facilitating writing processes which are closer to the more familiar studio practices, including acceptance of multi modality, and by better inducting students into the world of writing we can take a more inclusive approach which would in itself lend validity to students' starting points and therefore enable greater levels of confidence, skill development and, consequently, criticality.
>
> (Mayfield 2005:7)

Mayfield's work is particularly interesting because of its links to other key influences in the literature reviewed: lack of clarity in the setting and

writing

learned knowledge
implicit evidence
left brain   learned skills
lo interaction   obscure audience
isolated experience
prescriptive   rules to follow
analysis   tutor centred
absolute
external initiation
indirect to personal goals
academic
exclusive

language/content

processes

support and guidance

studio

tacit knowledge
explicit evidence
right brain   innate skills
hi interaction   sense of audience
shared experience
exploratory   rules to break
synthesis   student centred
incremental
internal initiation
direct to personal goals
vocational
inclusive

Parallels to strategies for writing and strategies for design,
The student experience of studio projects as compared to written assignments
Mayfield, 2005:7

assessing of written assignments as contributing towards the exclusivity

of academic writing practices Lillis (2001); students' reluctance to draw on

their own experience or identity (Ivanič 1998), and; evidence from Mayfield's

research which supports the view of Orr and Blythman (2004) that art

students reject writing and view it as a necessary evil. I am also interested

in her visual conceptualization of the student experience of writing as

compared to studio practice, and the some of the parallels I see with

Raein's (2003) discussion paper and Wood's (2000) diagram illustrating

the differences in monastic and crafts-guilds modes of knowledge (see

page 29) as offering insights into the processes of writing and making.

Mayfield's questioning as to whether the boundaries between them can be

merged is at the root of many of the propositions, theoretical or practical,

in the literature that provided the context for my research. Mayfield also

emphasizes the importance of the emotional experience of learning and

proposes a move towards teaching and learning experience that takes

account of the feelings of students. This might include a more open

approach from tutors, many of whom, she suggests, fail to practice the

reflexivity we ask of students.

Austerlitz's (2008) anthology brings together studies exploring the

importance of emotions and social interactions in creative practice-based

learning. Most of the papers focus on studio practice, but Lioy's paper

(pp155-167) describes an extra-curricular action research creative writing

project she designed to support overseas, mostly Asian, students in writing

their dissertation. I was interested in Lioy's own identity within the research

in the way she conceived the design through drawing parallels between

Laurillard's (2002) proposed models for learning and her own Montessori

background. What is significant is the self-critical honesty which Lioy

(2008:163) demonstrates in the evaluation of her research, her sensitive

reflections on the impact the work had on students and on her own practice:

> Some of the students told me they considered the writing
> workshop as a life-changing experience. It helped them to
> understand their equality, through focusing on their differences
> and reflecting on their own roots and on their journeys until that
> moment. I have the feeling I am the person who changed more
> through the experience.

The inclusion of this example is to foreground the need to acknowledge the

importance of students' social interactions, with peers and tutors, within any

proposed models for teaching or supporting both studio practice and writing

as a 'creative act'. Austerlitz (2008:20) writes in his introduction:

> since engaging with creative acts requires students to reflect in
> and on action (Schön, 1983) they potentially are in a relatively high
> state of awareness with regards to their performance and to the
> impression they make on others. This relative awareness can by
> itself increase emotionality and affective impact on both creative
> and educational processes.

Greenbank and Penketh (2009) reporting on their research on student autonomy

and the dissertation, highlight the significance of supervisory relationships. Their

research focuses on the student perspective, and they remind us that tutors,

if interviewed, would be likely to offer different perspectives. They highlight

tensions which occur through the process which affect the level of autonomy

students can bring to their work: deciding on a suitable topic and inconsistency

in advice and feedback. The participants in their research were clearly

'conscious of the need to satisfy the expectations of their tutors' (Greenbank

and Penketh 2009:467) which is a constraining factor in achieving autonomy

and works against the development of independent learning,

Much of the literature is concerned with offering practical suggestions for

the improvement of teaching in art and design, particularly concerned with

written assignments. There is an emphasis on supporting, encouraging

and even changing the nature of writing for art and design, as opposed to

evidencing intellectual engagement with the subject in non-written form.

Alternatives to the traditional academic writing, and particularly those which

offer an alternative assessment route for the dissertation, are discussed

fully in Chapter Six, but I now propose to examine literature which offers

the theoretical grounding for the development of alternative modes of

assessment which diminish or replace the written word completely.

The challenge to the historical dominance of the written word

My background as an artist/typographer creates some conflicts in the

terminology I use to refer to a 'text'. Within much of the literature I have

examined, and especially that which has a language and literacy focus, 'text'

is used to describe a communication, and texts that are language based

are referred to as verbal, as against a visual piece. In this section I make

comparisons between different modes of communication. In my work, I make

an intentional distinction between something spoken and something read.

In art and design, a text is often used to refer specifically to the printed word

whereas something spoken could be referred to specifically in terms of being a script, dialogue or a commentary for example. This distinction is significant in the context of this study as spoken texts, such as might comprise studio critiques, would centre on students' arts practice in a way that written texts, such as essays are more likely to be distanced from studio work.

Candlin (2000:96) highlights the debate about whether visual language could or should replace writing in her article arguing for practice-based doctorates in art and design. She challenges the belief that writing in art and design serves to legitimize students' work within the academy and concludes that

> instead of trying to make art practice fit academic regulations it would be more productive to use the practice-based PhDs as a way of re-thinking academic conventions and scholarly requirements.

Orr et al (2004) also point towards a re-questioning of the role of writing in art and design education. They reject the notion that writing should be constrained by academic conventions arising from other disciplines, challenging the view that academic rigour can only be expressed through writing. This creates a space to explore the relationship between visual and written or verbal texts, and the impact and potential offered by the expansion of visual culture through new media and technological advances which have enabled wider access to these modes of production.

In the final report of the *WritingPAD* project Marks' (2004) case study produced for *WritingPAD* is quoted as providing an effective summary of the challenges facing art and design education in the contemporary context and this resonates with my teaching experience:

> For many art and design students, writing is associated with prior weaknesses and failures and increasingly perceived as alien. Young people are writing and reading less and watching and talking more – reflecting not only the culture in which they have grown up (and their day-to-day experiences) but also relative educational priorities given to the teaching of writing during their previous and formative educational experiences.
>
> (Marks 2004:1)

Although primarily writing for the *WritingPad* project in his case study, Marks identifies one of the four key contextual aspects of my research to which I referred earlier, namely the challenge posed to the dominance of the written word by the emergence of the new media and the position occupied by visual culture in society today, an issue explored by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). Marks' reference to many students' associating writing with weaknesses or failure also supports arguments that prior experience and background will have a negative impact on students' ability to write in an HE context (Lillis 2001; Burke 2008; Greenbank and Penketh 2009) and highlights their lack of preparedness for this aspect of HE study.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) provide an interesting historical overview of the alternate dominance of visual and written communication and the status associated with the ability to read and write, which is maintained in the high regard still held for those competent in 'essayist literacy' of academia. They argue that a new emphasis on visual literacy poses a threat to the 'dominant' old visual literacy, which is concerned with visualizing text, citing Barthes' argument (*Rhetoric of the Image* 1977) that the meaning of images and other semiotic codes is always related to, or dependent on, verbal text.

Using a comparison of two children's books, they demonstrate that explicit messages combining text and image allow for less creative interpretation than visuals alone and that this impedes the opportunity for discourses with parents or adults on creation of meaning. They draw attention to the dominance of written texts over images which is seen in the gradual fading of visual elements in children's literature as they get older. They see this as limiting the interpretation of meaning and individual creativity, a phenomenon which characterizes the primarily instructive, transference of information model of UK secondary education and could be interpreted as helping to maintain institutionalized discourse. It could be argued that the absence of images in written texts allows for personal, imagined visual interpretations, particularly in creative writing, and this is where Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 33) acknowledge the 'political' involvement in their participation on the 'reshaping of the semiotic landscape'. As the specialist status of visual communication moves into the public domain they advocate a move towards a new literacy based on images and design, although this is seen as a threat, the decline of the culture. They perceive that the multimodality of written texts has been largely ignored in educational contexts, in linguistic theorising or in popular common sense, and draw parallels between visual, spoken and written language. In the same way that spoken and written language is organic and fluid, so is visual language. It is also culturally specific and differs from one society to another, or from one social group to another.

Concern over the relationship between forms of writing, and between written and visual modes of communication also led Mayfield (2003) to

consider multimodality and the multi modal communication offered by new media technologies in her *WritingPAD* case study (reviewed on pages 51-54). This is another of the few references to alternatives to writing in order to assess intellectual engagement with art and design theory and the context of historical and contemporary practice. However she expresses concern about the capability of tutors to read, assess and teach the skills necessary to implement and support such a model. I would argue that a model of tutor practice drawn from Mayfield which encourages open discussion with students around struggles in their (tutor's) own work might open up the spaces for tutors to feel empowered rather than threatened by changes to current practice. However it would appear that in order to effect any changes in culture or practice amongst teaching staff still entrenched in the established post-Coldstream traditional academic model, considerably more work needs to be done.

Satchwell and Ivanič (2007) advocate drawing on students' experience of multiple literacy practices in the broadest sense to include visual, verbal and written texts in their *Literacies for Learning in Further Education* project, which aimed to

> identify ways in which people can bring literacy practices from
> one context into another to act as resources for learning in a
> new context.
>
> Satchwell and Ivanič (2007: 303)

Researchers worked with tutors to identify how students' literacy practices outside college might be mobilized to increase their success on their

courses. A key factor emerging from the outcomes of the research is the importance of the 'ownership' of their literacy practices, which contrasts sharply with academic writing, in which the identity of student writers is either absent or compromised. The report also seems to suggest that students' literacy practices outside college are contextualized in ways that hold more meaning for them. The majority of students in their study viewed their course as unconnected with their everyday lives, or as a means to an end. Satchwell and Ivanič (2007) also highlight the multimodal nature of events, linguistic, visual and material, the simplest texts, all shaped by social purposes and practices. This multimodality is a particularly significant part of art and design practice, which opens up opportunities to make meaningful connections between students' art and design practice and their texts. A consideration of what the nature of a text is, and the relationship between written texts and visual communication, is particularly pertinent in art and design students' practice as text and images are inextricably linked. In the context of contemporary practice students are encouraged to include references to their influences in their arts practice, reflect on the creative process and evaluate the results through learning journals and artists' statements.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have linked the literature I have examined to the four key issues I identified as framing my research:

- to provide the context for the study looking at how art and design education has been re-formed to include the practice of academic writing;

- to examine the conception of the practice of academic writing as being non-inclusive and as a covert political act to maintain existing power relations in education;

- to address concerns surrounding the integration of studio practice and critical intellectual engagement with art and design;

- to critically examine the challenge to the historical dominance of the written word in the context of technological advances which have placed an emphasis on visual culture and influenced cultural discourse practices.

As far as possible, I have presented this by focusing on each aspect within a fairly linear structure to help the reader follow the threads of argument, but they are inter-related and interwoven. Burgess et al (2006:95) highlights this problem:

> Perfection of design in your structure for your thesis is not possible – it will always be flawed. This is because while your ideas will be multidimensional the structure of your thesis is linear and unidimensional.

Perhaps this is the most potent argument of all for a re-framing of practice when consideration is given to the potential of multimodal alternatives, such as film for example, to incorporate layers of meaning.

Chapter Three

Methodological literature

In this chapter I evaluate the methodological options that I considered in my research design, and describe how I was influenced by the arguments presented in the literature I examined. I tried to look at as many perspectives as possible, then refined my reading to focus on what I identified as the most suitable methods for my research questions, which are:

1. What is the function of academic writing in a higher education art and design context?

2. In what kinds of ways does the students' prior educational experience impact on their ability to engage with academic writing in their course?

3. Does academic writing enable art and design students to link theory and practice?

And the question which emerged:

4 Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing?

I knew that I would be using qualitative methodologies to investigate my research question, because I wanted to look at individuals' lived experience in the context of a particular situation. In the case of my work, this would focus on students' experience of, and attitudes to academic writing, to consider how appropriate academic writing is as a complement to their arts practice. In this chapter I first explore how qualitative research is defined in

the literature, looking at the aims of this kind of research, its potential and

limitations, in order to situate my own research within a clear framework.

I explain how I considered my own position within the research, then I

describe how I chose options for data collection and analysis, all with

reference to the methodological literature.

Establishing a framework

Although recognizing the complexity of issues arising from the emergence

of qualitative research historically, Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3) propose this

initial generic description:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer
> in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices
> that make the world visible. These practices transform the world.
> They turn the world into a series of representations, including
> field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings,
> and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves
> an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means
> that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings,
> attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of
> the meanings people bring to them.

It is a long quote, but encapsulates what I wanted to do, and the approach

I wanted to take. Within it are implicit warnings and questionings of the

authenticity of the interpretive process. The use of phrases such as 'attempting

to make sense of' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005:3) is more compatible with my

postmodernist view of the world and a rejection of the notion of absolute truths

and the possibility of objectivity. I am comfortable in acknowledging that I try

to present a reasonable, sensitive and considered interpretation of the lived

experiences of the people who have allowed me access to their lives and work through my data. This is within the immediate context of their academic writing and arts practice, and can only ever be my interpretation.

Subjectivity and objectivity with regard to research are central themes in much of the methodological literature I have examined. This often centres on the position of the researcher, the authenticity of the data, and the interpretation placed on it. Eisner (1993:50) identifies two types of objectivity: ontological objectivity, which represents a model of research which aims to achieve objective reality, and which he suggests 'cannot in principal, provide what we hope for'; and, procedural objectivity which focuses on method to eliminate scope for personal judgment. In his view, this 'offers less than we think' as it only implies the existence of any kind of reality on the basis that some people can agree on a point. He suggests that might be all we can have, and urges us to recognize it as such. He argues that the legacy of the Enlightenment, with its need for what it misguidedly refers to as truth, has placed an over-inflated importance on so-called objectivity. Phillips (1993) suggests that the more straightforward the question or issue examined, the higher the possibility of objectivity, presumably because there is an increased probability of consensus. I can appreciate the idea behind his thinking. If you ask ten people if a lemon is yellow, it's likely that most will say yes and you may believe that there is sufficient evidence to prove that the lemon is yellow, but there remains the possibility of delving deeper, and asking what is the definition of yellow? Is the lemon yellow if in a dark room or in a certain light? And what is a lemon? We only conceive of

what it is through language. I wanted to find out about students as people, and specifically their differing perceptions and experiences of academic writing within the context of their involvement in art and design. This is never going to be straightforward enough to attempt to be objective in the sense that Phillips may regard as possible. In rejecting objectivity as a goal of my research I have found Schofield's (1993:93) discussion of qualitative research as being incompatible with achieving external validity, as defined by classical conceptions, helpful in legitimizing my proposed methodology and theoretical framework.

> The goal is not to produce a standardized set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issues would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation.

This description fitted my aspirations for the research. But how was I going to structure the work?

Case study

The literature I had read, particularly Ivanič's (1998) use of case study in her work, influenced my decision to consider case study as the most appropriate method for my research. Stake (1995:1) begins by situating the role of case study in education (and social service) and its relationship to people and programs:

> We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories.

I was drawn to this description, as I liked Stake's analogy of the case as a story. I feel strongly that participants in research should be regarded as important individuals all of whom have their own stories to tell. All of them have a personal perspective, which is much better described as a story than the rather impersonal label of 'case'. While recognizing that each individual in my study is unique, I was also interested in comparisons that may be drawn between their experiences to find out how they conceive of the relationship their writing has to their creative practice, and how much they are able to bring their identities to their work in those processes in order to address my research questions.

Burton (2000:215) highlights the lack of consensus over what constitutes a case study and that this has changed over time and between disciplines. Stake (1995:2) asserts that this is why we cannot make precise definitions of cases. Burton highlights the diversity of what constitutes a case drawing on other researchers' definitions, which include 'an individual, an organization, a country and a continent' and could also comprise an event or the implementation of organizational change. Burton (2000:216) highlights differing philosophical perspectives, and defines realists as taking the view that cases are given or discoverable, contrasting this with the nominalist view that cases can also be 'theoretically and socially constructed by researchers'. Stake (1995) takes a more pragmatic approach and makes a distinction between what he describes as an 'intrinsic' case study, when the case is given and we need to learn about it, and 'instrumental' case studies, where there is a research question and we seek to gain an understanding

into the question by studying a particular case. He adds a third category to which he refers as 'collective case study' (Stake 1995:4) when several cases are examined in the investigation of the same research question. I found this to be the closest definition of my own research. In respect of the selection of cases, Stake asserts that our first obligation is to understand each individual case. It may be helpful to select cases that are typical or representative of other cases, but he warns that a sample of just a few is unlikely to be a representation of others.

Yin (2003:xiii) warns that case study has been stereotyped as weak having 'insufficient precision (ie quantification), objectivity, or rigor' and that case study should be undertaken

> with the understanding that your methods will be challenged from rational (and irrational) perspectives and that the insights resulting from your case studies may be underappreciated.

He suggests that the researcher needs to deal with that challenge by ensuring that their data is collected, presented and analyzed fairly, culminating in a compelling report. Yin (2003:1) states that:

> case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'when' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.

Yin describes these case studies as 'explanatory' and expands on this to include two other types; 'exploratory' and 'descriptive', but asserts that these descriptions are not mutually exclusive and boundaries between them are not always sharp. The key is to be aware of the overlaps and ensure

the researcher uses the appropriate strategy for the circumstances. The

way in which all three researchers (Stake 1995, Burton 2000, Yin 2003)

choose to conceptualize case studies, essentially appears to characterize

the distinctions between subjects which Yin (2003:56) identifies as

being 'concrete' or 'abstract'. Yin illustrates these terms with examples:

individuals, organizations, schools and partnerships he suggests are more

concrete; and communities, relationships, decisions and projects are more

abstract. I interpret this to mean cases where the data includes descriptive

quantitatively-based evidence such as numbers of individuals within

organizations, which would only be disputed on levels of accuracy. Within

the case study the boundaries between different types of case are not

always clearly defined, and the researcher needs to develop and maintain an

awareness of the distinctions throughout the research process.

The emphasis Yin places on process in case study persuaded me to

explore case study design in some depth, to enable me to work to a

design framework that was explicit in its structure, aims and methods and

to continue to review it throughout the research. Yin's (2003:13) further

definition of a case study as:

> an empirical inquiry that
>
> - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life
>   context, especially when
>
> - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not
>   clearly evident

resonated with my perception of the context of my research and helped

to convince me that case study was an appropriate research strategy for my study. His identification of a multi-method approach as a common feature of case study work, and his advocacy of multiple case studies where appropriate, helped me to design a structure for my research. I have drawn on the models he offers as examples in his book and his strategies for interpreting and analyzing data in the following chapter describing my research methods.

Miller and Glassner (2004) argue that collective stories can provide more authenticity to the realities described, and Yin (2003:19) states that 'most multiple-case designs are likely to be stronger than single-case designs'. In exploring methodological literature it occurred to me there were aspects of my proposed work, those concerned with students' cultural backgrounds, which were rooted in ethnography. I had already found Lillis (2008) article to be a most potent argument for the use of multiple data sources in the context of my own work, and her focus on the consideration of context in relation to writing and the conception of writing as a social practice provide a coherent link to my research and the deeper consideration of ethnography to produce rich case studies around student writing. The use of multiple data collection methods form the basis for the argument that Lillis proposes in her advocacy of what she refers to as 'deep theorizing' in order to close the gap between text and context in academic writing research. In the conclusion to her article, she is critical of what is basically a lack of rigour in some ethnographic research on academic writing (Lillis 2008:381):

> Ethnography hovers in the background of much research on
> academic writing that seeks to be context sensitive, through
> an array of often oblique glosses, such as "case study" and
> "qualitative", but is often reduced to the level of method, and
> most commonly one method, that of talk around texts.

Lillis argues for a move away from writing in context towards a notion of

contextualization 'that is, researching what is relevant from any specific

aspect of context to specific acts and practice of academic writing.' She

refers to this practice as 'ethnography as methodology' which she describes

as (2008:381/2):

> sustained engagement with participants over a period of time,
> using a broad range of data in collection and analysis and a
> commitment to seeking out what is relevant to participants. The
> thick description made possible through such thick participation
> enables the researcher to explore specific microdetails of the
> relationship between texts and contexts.

She highlights the possibility that this opens up for blending 'emic' (writer

focussed informal understandings) with the 'etic' understandings of the

researcher/academic as positioned outside the situation under examination.

I had already made the decision to collect data from multiple sources within

my case studies such as interview data, and examples of written and visual

texts, before I read Lillis' work, but it has helped to legitimize this decision

in my own mind, and provided an exciting proposal for data analysis in the

final proposition in her conclusion, ethnography as deep theorizing. Having

established this as the framework within which I wanted to work, and the

emphasis placed on the management of subjectivity and maintaining critical

awareness of the process in the literature I had examined, I needed to

consider how I would manage my own position within the research.

The position of the researcher

Hellawell (2006:492) stresses the importance of researchers positioning

themselves on the 'insider-outsider continua' to enable themselves:

> to reflect critically on their own perceptions of where they
> stand in relation to their informants, and just as, if not
> more, significantly, what they consider to be the informants'
> perceptions of this relationship.

Hellawell highlights the multiple dimensions of this process. He illustrates

his point with an example of a researcher who discovered that some

experiences of the informants in his research mirrored his own, and he

felt a considerable empathy towards them during the interviews. Peshkin

(1988) draws attention to this in respect of what he calls a 'distorting

hazard' where the researcher empathises so much with the community

they are researching that there is a danger it might affect their capacity

to make a rational examination from different perspectives. I have found

that it's not always enough to be aware of possible distortions in the

interpretation of data. For example, in the identification of the themes

emerging from interviews with co-researchers, I coded the themes and

conducted a quantitative analysis of occurrences within the interview

transcripts (see Appendix 15, p261). When I compared the results of

the analysis with what I had held as an impression of the significance of

specific themes prior to analysis, it was quite clear that the emphasis was

quite different to what I had imagined. As a sole researcher I have had

to be careful about this kind of skewing of data, something that might

be alleviated to some extent if there were other researchers involved.

Other aspects of literature which examines issues as to how much the

researcher must remain mindful of their position within their own research,

concern both the historical background to the research, and the site of

the research. My experience of art and design education from when I first

encountered it in 1976 to the present will have influenced what I bring

to that discussion. Earlier in this chapter, I briefly discussed arguments

around objectivity and subjectivity, and rejected the notion that there

can be any absolute truths within the conceptual framework for the

research. This places subjectivity firmly in the spotlight. Peshkin (1988:18)

sees subjectivity as virtuous with the researcher bringing a distinctive

contribution from the 'unique configuration of their personal qualities joined

to the data they have collected'. He shares his practice of acknowledging

the various facets of his own identity to check against his interpretation of

data, to which he refers as his list of categories of 'I', such as his 'justice-

seeking I' and his 'pedagogical-ameliorist I'. However, Peshkin issues

a warning of the possibility that by being so consciously subjective, the

researcher could fall into the trap of being too smug and complacent,

and run into the danger of 'authorizing' her research to the point where all

her efforts to maintain the consciousness of her subjectivity are negated.

Peshkin (1988:17) suggests that researchers 'should systematically identify

their subjectivity throughout the course of their research.' Researchers

cannot be released from their subjectivity just because they admit to it.

Peshkin (1988:20) clarifies how this might be achieved, and provided at

least an aspiration for working:

> By monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering
> personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject
> are intertwined. I do not therefore exorcise my subjectivity. I do,
> rather, enable myself to manage it – to preclude it from being
> unwittingly burdensome – as I progress through collecting,
> analyzing, and writing up my data.

Data collection

What were the best methods for data collection and what did I want my

data to look like? Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3,4) describe a number of

possibilities:

> Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a
> variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience;
> introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and
> productions; observational, historical, interactional and visual
> texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and
> meanings in individuals' lives.

They too assert that 'objective reality can never be captured' (2005:5) and

advocate a multi-method approach to gain a richer in-depth understanding of

a phenomenon or inquiry. The use of multiple methods seemed appropriate in

consideration of my research question, and in respect of the literature I had read

(Fairclough 2001, Lillis 2008, Ivanič 1998, Mayfield 2005) which focuses on the

significance of an individual's prior social, cultural and educational experiences in

shaping their attitudes and approaches to an activity or phenomenon.

The use of interviews in the work of these researchers convinced me that this would be the most appropriate primary method of gaining insights into participants' lived experiences in addressing my research questions. I found the extracts from interview data in Ivanič and Mayfield evocative and revealing and, having done some interviewing in previous work, I felt drawn to this as one means of data collection from the start of my research. Silverman (2006) identifies three approaches to interviewing: positivist, emotionalist and constructivist. A positivist approach would be most closely aligned to what Burton (2000) describes as realist, an approach which might be more appropriate to take in studying an 'intrinsic' case (Stake 1995). Positivists would aim to generate 'facts' from data Silverman (2006:119), and even where this is from a person's account, a researcher might seek to corroborate that reality with evidence from other sources. Emotionalism and constructionism would be more closely aligned to what Burton describes as a nominalist approach. Silverman (2006:123). defines emotionalists as being concerned with 'eliciting authentic accounts of subjective experience'. Having read various perspectives, the constructivist approach seemed to be most closely aligned to my aims for the research. Silverman (2006:9) defines constructionism, as treating 'social reality as constructed in different ways in different contexts.' In terms of applying this to interviews, he summarises it as allowing us

> to see local, interactional work carried out by both interviewer and
> interviewee, without losing sight of the cultural resources which
> they draw upon

(Silverman 2006:148)

Miller and Glassner (2004:125) critically examine the constructionist view

of the interview as 'an interaction between the interviewer and interviewee

in which both construct narratives as representative of the social world',

and introduce the proposition that the interview is meaningless outside the

context in which it occurs. Although the theoretical argument underpinning

this idea implies they are little more than invention, Miller and Glassner state

that they are not prepared to discount the possibility of learning about the

social world in their analysis of interview data. Rapley (2004:16) offers the

following explanation as to why:

> ...interview-talk *speaks to* and *emerges from* the contemporary
> ways of understanding, experiencing and talking about that
> specific interview topic. However, these ways of understanding,
> experiencing and talking about that specific interview topic are
> contingent on the specific local interactional context and should
> be analyzed, at least initially, from the circumstances of their
> production

summarising with '*Don't rip the words out of context*'. [emphasis in original]

Holstein and Gubrium (1997:127) summarise the goal of the interview as:

> ...to show how interview responses are produced in the interaction
> between interviewer and respondent without losing sight of the
> meanings produced or the circumstances that condition the
> meaning-making process. The analytic objective is not merely to
> describe the situated production of talk, but to show how what is
> being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied.

Their summary resonated with what I would aim to achieve through interviews.

Miller and Glassner (2004:127) introduce concepts around the relationship

of the researcher and the respondents as being key to what is said and

the way that information is delivered. Ivanič (1998:13) observed that

'the critical view of the social construction of identity ... recognizes the

powerful influence of dominant ideologies in controlling and constraining

people's sense of themselves'. In a situation where the interviewer is

part of the institution, however invisible and unimportant she may try to

make that, consideration should be given to the effect that may have on

respondents' presentation of themselves. In their argument for the active

interview Holstein and Gubrium (1997:116) assert that interviewers should

'formulate questions and provide an atmosphere conducive to open and

undistorted communication'. Drawing on Silverman (2006) and Miller

and Glassner (2004), I would now argue that it is not possible to know

if you have achieved channels of 'undistorted' communication, and the

examples Miller and Glassner offer on the effect of the relationship between

interviewer and interviewee, the possibility of shifting identities, or the

deliberate withholding of information by the interviewee which may occur

in an interview demonstrates this and forms part of my own experience.

Silverman's (2006) arguments surrounding the advocacy of any one

particular approach to interviewing are complex and have no easy answer,

but offers a critique on numerous examples upon which to draw in order to

raise awareness of issues arising in interview analysis.

Data analysis

In consideration of how I planned to make sense of the interview data, and

in consideration of any other texts I might collect, such as examples of

student writing or emails, I originally looked at conversation analysis (CA),

discourse analysis (DA) and returned to Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA). Silverman (2006:221-222) reminds us that 'the issue of context is crucial for qualitative social research' and proposes a 'crude' set of prescriptions about how to do CA

- try to identify sequences of talk

- examine how speakers take on roles or identities through the talk

- look for particular outcomes.

He warns against

- assuming a speaker's intentions

- explaining a turn at talk by reference to the speaker's role or status

- and trying to make sense of a single line of transcript in isolation from the rest.

It is, as he says, a 'crude' set of prescriptions, and is fairly simplistic and mostly commonsense. Peräkylä (2005:869) reminds us that if interviews are informal, and form part of ethnographic fieldwork where people describe their practices to the researcher, this is much closer to something 'naturally occurring' and should be analyzed as 'specimens of interaction and reasoning practices rather than as representations of facts or ideas outside the interview situation.' Peräkylä (2005:875) describes CA as 'a method for investigating the structure and process of social interaction between humans'. By contrast DA, dependent on context, may refer 'to many different approaches of investigation of written texts (and of spoken

discourse as well)' Peräkylä (2005:871). The theory being drawn upon here

is that which suggests that mental realities are linguistically constructed.

Potter (2004:203, emphasis in original) offers this definition of DA:

> DA has an analytic commitment to studying discourse as **texts**
> **and talk in social practices**... the focus is... on language as...
> the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes
> then, analysis of what people do. One theme that is particularly
> emphasised here is the rhetorical or argumentative organization
> of talk and texts; claims and versions are constructed to
> undermine alternatives.

Potter (2004) also suggests that discourse analysis has three unifying

assumptions: that we cannot treat accounts as true or false representations

of reality; concern for how participants' constructions are accomplished

or undermined; reflexivity – the way the text is a version of an attempt to

constitute an objective reality. Drawing comparisons between conversation

analysis and discourse analysis Silverman identifies the key difference as

being the failure of CA to engage directly with the cultural and political

context. Peräkylä (2005:875) asserts that CA is 'not a theoretical enterprise

but rather a very concretely empirical one' although through empirical studies

a body of theoretical knowledge about the organization of conversations has

emerged. He suggests that criticisms that CA prioritizes form over meaning

result in the misunderstanding that arises from the technical exactness of

CA (see Peräkylä 2005:876/7 for detail). His final assertion on the subject

that 'CA research that focuses on institutional interactions explores the exact

ways in which the performers of different institutional tasks shapes their

actions to achieve their goals' helps to confirm my feeling that CA might be an appropriate tool for observation rather than textual analysis.

Having been convinced by Peräkylä's alignment of interview data such as mine with 'naturally occurring' material, as well as the conceptual compatibility I felt discourse analysis (DA) to have within my research, I turned again to Potter's (2004) discussion of the potential for DA in the analysis of naturally occurring talk. He first explains the diversity of its origins in linguistics, cognitive psychology, socio-linguistics and poststructuralism. He describes this last one as being most closely associated with Michel Foucault and 'is less concerned with discourse in terms of specific interaction as with how a discourse, or a set of 'statements', comes to constitute objects or subjects' (Potter 2004:201). There are many layers of the 'appropriateness' of academic writing as a complement to art students' practice within my research in terms of: relevance or compatibility to arts practice; removal or compromising of identity; the 'institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis 2001); its position within the emergence of new media; and concern over inclusion. Foucault's focus resonates with the conceptual framework for my research in some sense; the examination of the historical dominance of the written word, and the social and educational systems that place certain sections of society in a better position to engage in educational practice than others, for example. Holstein and Gubrium (2005:490/1) describe Foucault as considering 'how historically and culturally located systems of power/ knowledge construct subjects and their worlds', and whilst acknowledging the concern both have with social practice, they observe that:

Because Foucault's project (and most Foucauldian projects) operates in a historical register, real-time talk and social interaction are understandably missing from the chosen bodies of empirical material.

They contrast Foucault's approach to discourse analysis with ethnomethodology, which seems much more in line with Potter's definition from their assessment of it. They observe that although ethnomethodologists focus on how people use talk and interaction to accounts for their actions and their worlds, the influence of Foucault raises awareness of 'the related conditions of possibility for what the results are likely to be' Holstein and Gubrium (2005:490/1). From this, I conceptualize Foucault as being concerned with situations, and ethnomethodology with the actions and interactions of players within those situations. As such, both offer possibilities to achieve a greater understanding for different aspects of inquiry around my research question.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 2005: Peräkylä 2005), which is concerned with the examination of how different texts reproduce power and inequalities, would have been a particularly useful tool, along with CA, had I chosen to observe student-tutor interactions in the process of the production of their academic texts, although my presence as an observer may have affected the interactions. Peräkylä (2005:870) observes that many qualitative researchers using written texts as data, especially where the text analysis is not the core of the research, do not follow any predefined protocols adopting an informal approach. They simply read and reread their empirical materials and try to identify key themes to build a picture

of the phenomenon under scrutiny. In some respects, especially when reflecting upon my interpretations, that was the position I chose to adopt, particularly in the analysis of the interview data. I did also use a systematic approach to the identification of themes, which proved to be useful (see Appendix 12, p258). However, as a novice researcher I needed to be aware of conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis (or critical language studies), as well as discourse analysis in order to determine their potential within the context of my work and apply what proved to be most useful.

As I had videoed my interviews, this visual data was also used in the interpretation of my data. Heath (2004: 267-8) identifies conversation analysis and ethnomethodology as providing the analytic resources to examine video in order to make sense of the way 'participants themselves produce social actions and make sense of those actions and activities of others', and to provide additional insights from interviews and focus group work. Referring to the reliability of video recording Peräkylä (2004: 299) reminds us that the researcher 'needs to pay attention to both the technical quality and inclusiveness of the recordings and to the interplay of spoken language with other modalities of communication and social action'. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996:39) also highlight the importance of including the visual with verbal.

> A spoken text is not just verbal but visual combining with 'non-verbal' means of communication such as facial expression, gesture, posture and other forms of self-presentation

My own experience of, and involvement in, the interview situation required me to be sensitive to how much that affected my focus and interpretation of data.

In preparation for analyzing the interviews, I was influenced by Charmez (2006) book. I was looking for a convincing theoretical model for analyzing and interpreting data, and I liked her direct style of writing, and strategies she proposed for applying theory to practice. Charmez (2006:2) describes grounded theory methods as consisting of 'systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves.' Her overview of the process of coding data was helpful in offering a number of alternatives dependent on the research. Charmez looks at word-by-word and line-by-line coding which would be helpful in relation to conversation analysis, but it helped me to realize the level of detail, for what I was proposing to do, was obscuring and complicating. Over the course of the research I referred to both Charmez (2006) and Miles and Huberman (1994) in the coding process. From a personal perspective I struggled with what seemed to me to be a rather, quantitative, detached aspect of the systematic coding of interview data described by Charmez. Although I recognised the need to review and reflect on my own subjectivity throughout the research, I viewed the process as paying insufficient attention to the complexities of the accounts.

In this context, Miles and Huberman's (1994:8) description of the strategy adopted by phenomenologists interested me:

> Phenomenologists often work with interview transcripts, but
> they are careful, often dubious, about condensing this material.
> They do not, for example, use coding, but assume that through
> continued readings of the source material and through vigilance
> over one's presuppositions, one can reach the "Lebenswelt" of

the informant, capturing the "essence" of an account – what is
constant in a person's life across its manifold variations

There were aspects of this method that appealed to me. Had I been working
on the project with other researchers, and could have benefited from
another perspective in interpreting the transcripts in full, I might have felt
able to justify it, but I was concerned to rely solely on my own judgment
without any consideration given to numeric evidence that emerges from
coding and capturing the frequency of the occurrence of themes. In Chapter
Four, I describe my interview analysis, where I used a combination of these
methods to build a convincing case for my interpretation of the data.

Conclusion

In this chapter, having situated my research as being a qualitative study,
I reflected on my understanding of what constitutes and characterizes
qualitative research through an examination of the methodological literature
which informed my research design. I looked at the central themes of
objectivity and subjectivity and how that related to the external validity of
qualitative research. Examples on which I had drawn in the substantive
literature review (Chapter Two) persuaded me to look closely at case study
as an appropriate structure within which to frame my research, and I looked
at how case studies are categorized by a number of key writer/researchers
in the field, in order to decide how my work would fit with reference to the
possible options. I established the framework for my research as a multiple
case study structure drawing upon multiple data sources. I referred back to

subjectivity in order to position myself within the research, looking at how

I might manage my dual roles; my professional role within the organization

within which I proposed to conduct my study; and my position as a

researcher on the insider-outsider continuum. Through the examination of

case study exemplars in the literature, I chose to look at interviews as being

the best primary source of data for my case studies, and considered how

researchers conceptualize and conduct their interviews in order to rationalize

my own approach. I was hoping that other data sources would emerge from

interviews with participants in the research, such as examples of their written

work and its relationship to their studio practice, and informal interactions,

which would help to build a richer case study around each individual. In

anticipation of this and the interview data, I looked at conversation analysis,

discourse analysis and critical language studies as offering possible models

for data analysis and interpretation in deciding the methods for conducting

the research. Having considered methodological options for research and

how these might relate to my own situation and approach to working, the

next chapter goes on to describe my research design and the process and

progress of my research.

Chapter Four

Theory into methodological practice

In the previous chapter, I considered options for my research design by examining different perspectives on the methods I had identified as being those that might best generate illuminating data in respect of my research questions. I devote this chapter to describing my methods, and the structure, processes and approach I have chosen, with reference to the ethical considerations from a theoretical perspective in anticipation of the research, and as they have arisen throughout.

As I move on to explain the structure of my research and to describe the methods I have used to collect and analyze data, it might be helpful to refer to Appendix 7 (p248), which illustrates the time frame and the nature of the data collected for each individual who volunteered to take part in the initial study and main study. I undertook an initial study to test out the efficacy of my research design, and specifically interview techniques and the interpretation of data from those interviews. In the initial study I interviewed five undergraduate student volunteers, four of whom continued working with me subsequently on the main study. One student from the initial study had already graduated and, as my research focus changed following that work, I have not included that interview in the data as I did not use it in the main study. I worked with the four original student volunteers, and then five additional participants in the main study collecting data over a two-year period. At the start of the main study the

original four were in Stage 3 (their third year of study); three in Stage 2; and

two in Stage 1. My aim has been to build an illuminating case study around

each participating student to enable me to consider three research questions:

1. What is the function of academic writing in a higher education
    art and design context?

2. In what kinds of ways does the students' prior educational
    experience impact on their ability to engage with academic
    writing in their course?

3. Does academic writing enable art and design students to link
    theory and practice?

Another question emerged from the research:

4   Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with
    theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing?

I list data sources used to address this question in Appendix 8 (p252). All

of these questions are aligned to the four key issues which are of interest

to me in the context of art and design education: historical developments

in art and design education; the conception of traditional academic writing

as non-inclusive; current concerns surrounding the integration of studio

practice and critical intellectual engagement with art and design through

discourse, and; the challenge to the historical dominance of the written word

in the context of technological advances and cultural practices. These were

discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

My data has come from semi-structured interviews, informal conversations,

email exchanges and examples of students' written academic texts and

creative art work. I wanted undergraduate students to volunteer to take part in

the study and I had been hoping that I would be able to involve students from

each stage of their course, to get a sense of how students manage to develop

academic writing skills throughout the course working towards their final

dissertation and how this relates to their creative practice. However I did not

feel it was necessary or desirable to attempt to pre-select students, as it was

not my aim to represent the experiences of any particular student groups, nor

was I anticipating the potential for generalization. I was more concerned that

they should want to take part and that if they did, this would reduce the risk of

them dropping out, a consideration in respect of the timeframe for the project.

The initial study

At the time of the initial study, I wanted to find out whether art students'

informal writing practices could help to inform their academic work. I had

already decided to send the letter I had composed to students inviting

them to participate in my research, which I placed in sealed envelopes

in their pigeonholes on campus. The letter was comprehensive in terms

of the amount of information about the rationale for the research (see

Appendix 3, p242). The letters were spectacularly unsuccessful in eliciting

a response, perhaps symptomatic of art students' aversion to reading and

writing practices noted in some of the literature. I was conscious that I had

stated that it would be my only request for volunteers, and that I needed to

honour that promise, but I received no response at all. I wanted to discover

whether students had actually received or noticed the letter, so I asked

students I already knew if they had. Four of the five volunteers I had for

the initial study were as a result of that conversation rather than the letter. The fifth came to the interview with her volunteer friend, but they insisted on being seen together. This meant that I had had previous contact with all but one of the participants. This proved to be helpful as I did not have to expend as much time building rapport, but I felt that some aspects of our previous relationship may have influenced what was said.

I had prepared for the interviews I conducted through my reading, having tried to absorb the theoretical aspects of interview design, but it was through practice, and initial examination of the data once transcribed, that the complexities of the issues around interviewing took on a reality in the context of my work. My interviews for the initial study were semi-structured using a prepared set of interview questions (see Appendix 5, p246), although my technique permitted the development of arguments and deviation naturally occurring from the questions. I had rejected a more structured approach as I felt that the restrictions this model imposes on the interviewer preclude any spontaneous or creative interactions and rendered this inappropriate for what I wanted to investigate. My position as an 'insider' within my institution may have impacted on some of the responses in my interviews. Although I had stressed the confidentiality of the interview at that point I suspected that at least one co-researcher hoped that I might be a conduit through which her comments would be passed on to tutors, of whom she was critical, and I felt the need to re-emphasise the confidentiality aspect of the activity.

I collected data from one videoed interview with each person and analyzed data from the films and interview transcripts. I chose to use video to capture

my interviews for several reasons. I have used video in previous research

projects and have found that it enables me to devote my complete

attention to the person with whom I am conversing, which contributes

towards a much more natural interaction than would be possible if I had

to make notes. It could be argued that this would be achieved equally well

with audio and that to some extent, audio might viewed as less intrusive

than video, but I would refute that. I have found that in the course of the

interview, the video camera is soon forgotten and the footage reveals very

little evidence of 'playing up to the camera' or evidence that it makes the

interviewees more self-conscious or uncomfortable. In addition to this,

video offers visual clues that can be detected from the footage that may

be unnoticed during the course of the action. At times during transcription,

these contribute towards interpreting the meaning, the tone and mood

of responses offering reminders of the moment which otherwise might

have been forgotten. At the point in the research where I was beginning

to conduct interviews, I had looked at examples of transcribed text from

Silverman (2006), Peräkylä (2005) and Ivanič (1998), and drew on their

influence in transcribing my data. Later, when planning for the main study,

I realized that aspects of transcription with which I had struggled, were

well documented in literature and needed to be carefully considered and

decisions justified. Examples of this occurred in my data, such as the

representation of incidences where participants deliberately changed their

mode of speech to make a point; speaking with received pronunciation to

indicate a greater level of education.

The main study: a change of direction

It was only in the latter stages of reporting on the initial study that I realized

the full extent of the ambiguities in what I was purporting to be doing and

where my real interests were situated. I changed the focus of my research,

and although my research questions have been through several stages of

rewording, primarily to enable me to rein in the scope of the work feasible

in the timeframe more effectively, the fundamental aims became clear to

me at that point in the research.

I found Ivanič's work insightful and have drawn heavily from her influence. In

reporting on my research for the initial study, I had never felt comfortable with

the referents I used for the students who agreed to participate in the work.

The way she refers to the subjects of her study as co-researchers seemed

to encapsulate a sense of shared discovery through reflection. When I first

began the work, although I liked that term, I didn't feel secure enough to use

it, and it was somehow neither accurate nor appropriate. As the work has

progressed, the relationships that developed became more compatible to the

co-researcher relationship she describes (Ivanič,1998:110):

> The research was 'collaborative research' and the people I
> interviewed about their writing were 'co-researchers' rather than
> as 'subjects', 'informants' or 'students'. Collaborative research
> is a form of research which minimizes the distinction between
> 'researcher' and 'researched' in which all participants work
> together as co-researchers.

Ivanič explains that not all the co-researchers need to have the same

goals for the research, but their individual goals might be some form of

political or personal action as a result of the findings. This notion of the co-construction of the research seems also to resonate with Freire's ideological model for a liberating pedagogy (see page 31) as helping to form the conceptual framework for my research. Ivanič's (1998:110) objective to:

> find out about the alternatives people bring with them from their experiences outside the institution of higher education, and to understand from their own point of view the dilemmas they face, and the nature of the pressure on them to conform

covers some aspects of what I wanted to examine in the context of my own research question, and Ivanič presents a convincing argument to support this model for research. She argues that she and her co-researchers were not discussing their writing within a tutor-student role, placing her as an authority, but they were working together to bring different insights to the problem.

Ivanič's research focused on mature students' as a lens through which to examine the construction of identity in academic writing as a phenomenon. Within her study, she presented Rachel, one of her co-researchers, as a specific case study and examined various aspects of the construction of identity, drawing on insights from her other co-researchers. Her focus was on language and discourse in this process. I have struggled at times to conceptualize my research within a structure, and I suppose I should not be surprised that, as the research progressed, it became easier to situate the methods within a framework. After much deliberation, I settled on the conception of my research as being a phenomenological study, examining the curricular ambiguities and synergies of two creative processes, studio practice and academic writing, within a specific context, that of art and

design education. In order to gain insights into this phenomenon, my

volunteers from the student population, to which I will hereafter refer as

co-researchers, provide their own insights into the issues embedded in the

research questions. These I present as individual cases, which I analyze

within a multiple case study structure.

The initial study enabled me to test out the efficacy of my methods. This was

despite the shift in emphasis away from the micro concerns of conversation

and discourse analysis, because the focus of the study was still concerned

with coming to a sophisticated understanding of particular texts in order

to inform the development of others. The four original participants still on

course agreed to continue to work with me as the research progressed,

but I wanted more student volunteers to give me access to a wider range

of perspectives on academic writing in art and design education. I was also

concerned that if that the sample was too small, I would be at risk of being

unable to complete the research if any participants chose to opt out.

In generating interest I needed to review the process, reflecting on why the

first round of letters had not generated any response, and how this might have

been achieved without exerting inappropriate pressure. From discussions with

those who did respond, it is clear that many students did not read the letter,

or may have read it and immediately discarded it. I considered alternative

strategies which would not place students under pressure, but which might

be more effective in prompting them to volunteer to take part. One possibility

was to introduce the project verbally at the beginning of a lecture, but I

rejected this as it could give students the impression that the institution, as

opposed to the researcher, owns the research and might affect their approach

to responding. I considered a poster campaign using the student notice

boards, followed by a private letter, but rejected this too as my experience of

students responding to posters has not been very positive. I finally settled on

using email as a primary method of communication, with a simple invitation

to participate in my research (see Appendix 4, page 245), and followed the

responses up with a meeting to present and explain the original letter. I was

concerned about this as few students use their college accounts and staff are

not permitted to contact them through private email accounts, but it proved to

be more effective than the letters. I had six responses, and five people agreed

to be part of the research following an initial meeting with each individual at

which I explained the nature of the research. Although I had hoped that my

volunteers would be representative of the diversity of the student body, I made

no attempt to 'select' cases in this way but relied on volunteers to provide a

random sample. In the event, the low number of volunteers meant that I did

not have to make any choices. This was fortunate, as I had not pre-empted a

strategy for this scenario, something I would consider in planning research in

the future.

Collecting data: interviews

The initial study was helpful in determining the efficacy of my interviewing

technique in eliciting insightful responses. A practical example of this was

when, reflecting on my video interviews and the transcripts, I could identify

where I have inadvertently interrupted a co-researcher when s/he appears to

have been about to say something that could have been significant. For this,

I looked at Silverman's (2006:210-221) examination of turn-taking and repair, the relationship of each turn to the previous and the strategies that speakers use as a 'repair mechanism' when, for example, participants speak at the same time. Not only did this call into question the prudence and sensitivity of my listening skills, but also required me to analyze how much I am reproducing the power relations existing in a tutor-student relationship and the appropriateness of this in the context of the interview.

Having gained a better understanding of theoretical approaches to interviewing helped me to make decisions to improve my strategies and technique accordingly. As the research progressed, and the relationships with the co-researchers developed, the dynamic nature of my position as researcher constantly reminded me of the need for self-reflection, and the management of my subjectivity (Peshkin 1988). After the initial study, I revised the questions for the first interviews with the five new co-researchers very little (see Appendix 5, p246) only removing one that had focused on their informal writing practices, and adapted the research question and the verbal introduction to the research that I presented to participants to reflect my changed research focus. The first questions remained general, asking about their education to date, the decision-making in their choice of art and design, and how they were finding their course of study. I asked them what they felt their successes were and to identify where they had most concerns. From these I was aiming to get a picture of how they had arrived at an art and design institution and what they chose to share with me about the journey. The work of Fairclough

(2001), Lillis (2001) and Ivanič (1998) had persuaded me that it was important to know something of my co-researchers' prior experiences for a better understanding of their approach to academic writing, but I avoided asking questions that invaded their personal lives or social or cultural backgrounds. They had agreed to take part in research examining the relationship of academic writing to arts practice, and although I was aware from the literature that issues of identity might emerge, which could have a bearing on their practice, I hoped that this would emerge in the course of our interviews and interactions. The rest of the questions focussed on their writing practices, how they felt about writing and how much it related to their studio practice. Subsequent interviews with co-researchers were less structured, clarifying points from previous interviews and updates on their academic writing journey and creative practice.

In interviews for the initial study I had positioned the video camera to focus on the co-researcher, but in the next round of interviews I used two cameras, one trained on myself, and one on my co-researcher. Silverman (2006) warns against neglecting to collect information on how people interact and I wanted to critically analyze my own interactions to try to minimise the possibility that I would influence what my co-researchers said by inadvertently exposing too much of my own opinions on an issue in a way that might prompt them to respond to me, rather than the issue. I analyzed and took account of all the interview data (Appendix 7, p248), and I outline further details of the analysis below. Although I had changed the focus after the initial study and some questions had become less

relevant, there was a considerable amount of material from the initial study that was helpful in providing insights into my research focus.

I downloaded the videotapes into iMovie on my computer, and generated a Quicktime movie. In this way I was able to view both films simultaneously while transcribing, which speeded up the process. It removed the need for such extensive rewinds, and helped with filling in speech, which might have been indistinct on one tape, but clear on another. Although it helped to make the process of transcription flow more easily when I reflected on how helpful that additional visual data was, I didn't feel it justified the extra time downloading the videotape, and there was an additional practical problem that my computer did not have sufficient memory or storage capacity to cope with the many large files I was generating. I abandoned the practice for subsequent interviews, but lived to regret it, as the videotape failed on one interview and I had to rely on notes to capture content. On reflection, it would have been more sensible to continue to use two tapes, even if I hadn't needed to download all the data to computer.

I followed up every interview with each co-researcher with email contact to send each person a copy of their transcribed interview to check accuracy, and give them the option to remove or to add anything. In transcribing the interviews, I used some of the conventions in Dressler and Kreutz (2000:29-34). They grouped their twenty-one transcriptions into five categories, using commonly used names and notations: intonation (rising and falling speech, temporal features (pauses, speed of speech), intensity (emphasis, mood), breathing and transcriber's comments. From the intonation category, I used

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Transcription conventions

Rising intonation	=	?
Stress	=	CAPITALS
Short pause	=	...
Long deliberate pause	=	[pause]
Trasncriber's comments	=	(action reported eg 'laughs')
Unclear speech	=	(indistinct on tape)

a question mark for rising intonation and capitals for stress, but I rejected

symbols for rising and falling intonation and continuous intonation as such

minute detail was more than I needed for the context of my study. Instead

where this occurred and I felt it necessary to add to the meaning of what

was being said I included this in the transcriber's notes instead. I also

adopted this strategy with temporal features and intensity such as speaking

a phrase deliberately slowly, intentionally loud or soft speech. Breathing

was not a significant feature in the transcripts, except when it was, perhaps,

a sigh of frustration, in which case I indicated this by inserting '(deep sigh)'

for example to accompany the spoken text. On a few occasions, when

working on analysis and my transcriptions alone did not reveal sufficient

information to make a judgment, I returned to the Quicktime movie of the

interview to remind myself of the interaction with the benefit of all the visual

clues in behaviour. This was not a frequent enough occurence to make me

feel that my transcription conventions were insufficiently comprehensive.

My simple transcription key is shown above, and in Appendix 11 (p257),

and a transcribed sample is included in Appendix 10 (p256).

I did feel it appropriate to consider aspects of transcription that affected the way I represent my co-researchers, and this quote from Charmez (1995:54) highlights the reason why:

> We start with the experiencing person and try to share his or her subjective view. Our task is objective in the sense that we try to describe it in depth and detail. In doing so we try to represent the person's view fairly and to portray it as consistent with his or her meanings.

On occasions during interviews my co-researchers actively used particular ways of speaking to make or illustrate a significant point, and that was important to record in the transcript.

Analysis of interview data

Interviews constitute the primary material used to build my case studies. The involvement with co-researchers over a period of time helped to build a picture of that person's experience and my knowledge and understanding of that person. I always viewed my co-researchers, as providing insights to help me respond to the various propositions emanating from the research question, and recognized that their story would be an individual and personal one. However, there were strong possibilities that shared or common experiences, such as the issue of identity in writing, would emerge from the data, opening up possibilities for pattern matching, and explanation building, taking into account alternative interpretations from the data.

The thinking behind my analysis of the interview data was not straightforward. I found Miles and Huberman's (1994:8) three approaches

to qualitative analysis the most helpful: interpretivism; social anthropology; and collaborative social research. My research for the EdD clearly did not fit with a collaborative social research model. There was evidence of some crossover in my thinking between an interpretivist and social anthropological approach, and it is most useful to conceptualize my journey through the research as being one of testing methods from both and making continual reflective decisions on their efficacy within the context of my own research. After the initial study, when my research focus changed, I revisited my coding strategy to focus on the aims and objectives that I had subsequently identified for my research. I realized that, in my analysis of the data from the initial study, the themes I had identified were actually much more pertinent to my revised research questions than the original ones.

Although I had found the phenomenological approach of reading and re-reading data that I had used in the initial study was the most compatible in trying to reach an understanding of human experience and interaction, I was concerned that my own subjectivity might skew or obscure my conclusions. I reached a point where I needed a clearer sense of direction and with some reluctance, these doubts persuaded me to try a more highly structured and applied coding strategy. I referred to both Charmez (2006) and Miles and Huberman (1994) in this process, but perhaps not quite closely enough: I ended up with more coding categories than was manageable. I had broadly based the codes on my four key issues (see pp 8-9), and assigned codes which broadly related to those, but I was

unconvinced that this was helping me to focus on common issues and

those most significant in respect of the research questions. It all seemed

to be a rather meaningless and tokenistic exercise at that point and

felt alien and rather detached and 'quantitative' but I persisted with it.

Using the rather confused set of codes I had already developed from the

phenomenological approach, I looked at a number of options for refining

these and I chose an 'accounting scheme' for codes which Miles and

Huberman (1994:61) describe as 'not content specific, but points to the

general domains in which codes can be developed inductively.' Of the

examples they show the one from Bogdan and Biklen (1992, reproduced in

Appendix 14, p260) was the best fit. Miles and Huberman advise keeping

all the codes semantically close to the terms they represent.

The examples they provided tend to use abbreviations, and they

discourage the use of numbers. I began by using abbreviations, but in

acknowledgment of my own predisposition for working visually (I could

not remember what the abbreviations meant when coding), I developed

my own symbols which I colour-coded for each 'bin', each of which was

defined by a specific focus and placed on a single sheet for easy reference

(see Appendix 12, p258 for coding symbols). I analysed all the interview

transcripts using this coding system (see example in Appendix 13, p259)

and created a matrix from which I could analyze the incidence of recurring

themes and draw comparisons across the data (see Appendix 15, p261).

I have used negative numbers where the codes revealed the opposite to

their definition. For example, in the bin which dealt with 'What difficulties

does academic writing cause?' under the subcode 'lack of confidence' where an example of 'being confident' occurs I assigned a negative number to that code. This method of coding proved to be illuminating and helped to both support and challenge some of the interpretations I had made using a phenomenological approach. I attributed numbers to incidences corresponding to themes that I had already documented as emerging from the data. When I looked at the numbers closely, I was able to highlight where some themes had assumed a greater significance than warranted. It also provided a timeline where inconsistencies and progress could be detected. For example, interview 10 with Jane occurred at a point where she was in conflict with a tutor, and this is reflected in the huge increase in 'negative feelings' documented in that interview that were inconsistent with the recordings in other interviews. The emerging themes did not correlate explicitly with my research questions, but provided insights into related issues raised through the literature.

To summarize my methods in analyzing interviews, which were also applied to my examination of email communications and notes from conversations, I began with a phenomenological approach, documenting my interpretations and impressions in respect of my research questions, being careful to reflect on how my own position and opinions affected my interpretations. As I wanted to test how effective this was as a method, particularly in respect of how much reliance there was on personal reflections on my own subjectivity. It was interesting to note that the impressions I had had of my co-researchers' moods or opinions in an

interview were not always borne out in a systematic examination of the content through codes. An example of this is seen through the thematic analysis for Jane, particularly in her first two interviews. I had identified themes using the phenomenological strategy of reading and re-reading transcripts first and followed this with a numerical analysis of the incidence of those themes within the interview transcripts. My impression of Jane was that, although she is dyslexic, she wanted to be able to write well. I viewed her attitude towards writing to be on a parallel with Roger's, in that although she acknowledged difficulties, she held writing up as the gold standard for academic achievement. When examining the numerical analysis of themes, there is only one suggestion of this recorded across all three interviews. Conversely there were nine recorded references to her negativity towards writing in the first interview, and thirteen in the second, which was much higher than my impressions during the interviews. The fact that there was only one negative reference in the last interview probably reflected her changed position having submitted and passed her dissertation and not having to do any more academic work in the foreseeable future.

The realization that my impressions from simply reading and re-reading did not always reflect the number of references to specific themes recording through numerical coding encouraged me to try to engage in a greater level of critical reflection on the subjectivity of my interpretations. In the final analysis of the data, this coding strategy was useful in this respect, but it was limited in its capacity to address the key issues that I

was exploring. It functioned in encouraging a greater level of self-critical reflection regarding the interpretation of the interview data and building connections to my research questions.

In my initial study, I found such systematic attention to detail was limited in the value it held in contributing towards a better understanding of my research question, and in particular the absence of context. In view of the focus of my research, I found Peräkylä (2005:869) helpful in describing two types of empirical materials as being much used in qualitative research but distinctly different, one of which is the interview, which

> consists of accounts given to the researcher about the issues in which he or she is interested. The topic of the research is not the interview itself but rather the issues discussed in the interview.

The other type he describes as naturally occurring materials, which in the context of my research, would include participants' written academic texts shared with me, informal interactions, and knowledge of their creative studio practice. These he describes as putting the researcher in more direct touch with the object under investigation, and this helped me to build my case studies and maintain focus on my research questions. The aim was always to try to understand the social worlds that exist both in the context of my co-researchers' current learning environment and in consideration of their past social and cultural experiences. The use of multiple sources of evidence emerged quite naturally from the first set of interviews where, for example, a co-researcher discussed a particular piece of written work as problematic. In this instance it was helpful to

see the written work, and the tutor's feedback to help to put the co-

researcher's comments into context.

Data from written work

In the initial study, one of my co-researchers showed me a piece of his

written work to which he had referred in the interview. Reading it persuaded

me that looking at my co-researchers' written work where possible might

be insightful and enhance my understanding of them. Silverman (2006:153)

makes the distinction between these kinds of texts and interview data as

'consisting of words and/or images which have become recorded without

the intervention of a researcher.' Although I had read extensively around

theoretical material on deconstructing texts, Ivanič (1998) provided the

most helpful framework for considering these texts as part of my research

process through the practical example and detailed description of Rachel

Dean's case in chapter six of her book (see Chapter Two, page 38). It helped

me to conceptualize the links between theory and practice, and it was

interesting that to reflect I was experiencing similar struggles to my co-

researchers in relating the theoretical and practical elements of my work.

Although the scope of Ivanič's work is much wider and more detailed I could

draw parallels between the linking of data from her interviews with Rachel,

Rachel's approaches to her written work, and the influence of her prior

experience and sense of identity.

When we discussed my co-researchers' work in interviews, I expressed a

desire to see their written and visual work, and if they agreed they would

email texts or invite me to the studio (see Appendix 7, p248 for full list

of data). Not all my co-researchers shared their writing with me, and the

extent to which this happened varied from person to person. There was

also a variance in the numbers of exchanges I had with my co-researchers

about their written pieces and the content of those exchanges. By this

point in the research I had a different relationship with each co-researcher.

The amount and nature of the personal information that had been shared

with me was particular to each individual over the period of the research,

and this affected what I felt was appropriate to say about their work. I

tended to be led by my co-researchers in this process, some of whom

were proactive in engaging in conversations about it, and others who were

happy to share it, but did not appear to wish to discuss it at all.

When I analyzed the written work for insights into my co-researchers'

attitudes and approaches to their academic writing, I drew upon ideas

from aspects of textual analysis informed by the literature such as CA,

DA and CDA (Silverman 2006, Potter 2004, Peräkylä 2005), but this was

primarily to remind myself about the key concepts of how issues around

power, voice and identity (Fairclough 2001, Lillis 2001, Ivanič 1998) may

be shaping the content of their academic writing. I tried to maintain an

awareness of how their use of language could provide me with clues during

what was predominantly an intuitive and common sense approach using

the knowledge I had acquired about my co-researchers over the period

of our work togther. I made observational notes about my interpretations

about their writing with those factors in mind, which in some cases I felt

able to share with them and others not. Where possible I looked at my co-researchers' written work with reference to their studio practice to try to establish whether there were links between their written texts and studio practice, whether or not those were explicit.

Sometimes they asked me to comment on their written work, which I agreed to do on the strict understanding that they should not view any of my observations as being authoritative in terms of the content of the assignment. I explained that this was because I had not been party to the taught parts of the course which formed the basis of the assignment, nor the original brief, and in view of the fact that I am not an art history or fine art specialist. Occasionally it felt patronizing to take that approach, but I needed to emphasize that they should not be influenced to change their style or content. I could have refused any commentary on the basis of my concern not to influence their writing, but I felt this would be inappropriate. The reluctance that some co-researchers had to share their work with me in the first place and their obvious desire to have my opinion once they had agreed to do so seemed entirely reasonable. Most of the written work I was given to read had already been assessed and so any comments I made were not going to affect the production of that particular text. I still confined comments to picking out what I felt were positive aspects of the work, and where there was ambiguity in their written feedback I would explain why I thought a tutor might have levelled a particular criticizm, but suggested they should ask the tutor to go over what they did not understand. When I was asked to comment on work in progress I avoided discussions around

style or content that could potentially influence the writer to deviate from

the prescribed course requirements. If I felt that they had written something

in a way that was difficult for the writer to understand I would suggest that

they read it back carefully or ask somebody else to check it. There was

some variance in the way I dealt with this with each co-researcher, and the

relationships were quite different, so the approach I have described is rather

generalized. As my co-researchers work at the same campus where I work

we would have conversations and informal interactions, and I would make

notes as soon as possible after these occurred if anything was mentioned

that was directly concerned with our work together.

Relationship between visual and written work

As touched upon in the previous section, I also looked at some of my co-

researchers' visual work to attempt to determine the relationship it has to

their written academic work, not as a critique of the work or an interpretative

analysis and I have included some as illustrations in this thesis. My research

question asks whether formal academic writing is the most appropriate

complement to art students' practice, and a consideration of both aspects

of my co-researchers' work seemed wholly appropriate in consideration of

this. Interestingly, I did not feel the same tensions surrounded expressing an

opinion of their visual arts work, or that by doing so I might be undermining

or coming into conflict with their tutors. The concept of being wrong or

being right in discussions around their arts practice appeared to be less

significant than in their written assignments, and students were willing, even

keen, for me to see their visual work. Before the Coldstream report, visual

arts practice used to be more concerned with the development of artistic skills, and was fairly prescriptive. In contrast, this extract from the subject benchmark statement (2002:2) produced by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAAHE) suggests a more holistic approach:

> The study of art and design as an academic and intellectual pursuit develops a range of cognitive abilities related to the aesthetic, the moral and the social contexts of human experience.

It is ironic that the greater focus on art and design as an 'academic and intellectual pursuit' allows for a greater breadth of interpretation as to what might be 'right' or 'wrong' in assessment, and the production of written texts, more traditionally grounded in academia, are much more prescriptive, even when produced within a subject area defined as the above quotation by QAAHE. Although discussions around assessment have formed part of my interactions with co-researchers, there is a considerable body of literature surrounding debates over assessment in art and design, and my research has only touched upon this within the context of the research questions.

The follow-up study

As the work progressed, I needed to address the additional question that had emerged:

4. Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing?

Over the course of this research, I have encountered strong opposition from some colleagues to the notion that academic writing might not always be the best complement to students' art practice. It has almost always

been met with an assumption that I am suggesting some kind of heinous

'dumbing down' in response to the diversity in the student population,

arising from the widening participation agenda. Nothing could be further

from the truth. I found that several institutions in the UK offer alternative

options to the traditional dissertation, although there is normally still a

requirement to evidence engagement with art history and theory through

the medium of academic writing throughout the courses.

The initial information about the alternative models currently on offer came

from a report by Paul Grace (2008), which he had researched and presented

to his own institution as part of a proposal to introduce an alternative

model of assessment there. I interviewed Paul with a view to including

his model in my study, but he told me that the proposal had initially been

rejected, although he is currently working to introduce it as a pilot on one

course. While pursuing this strand of enquiry, I discovered that my own

institution has offered an alternative model within one school for the past

two years, although this is not common practice across the institution as

a whole. Interestingly, in view of my observations about inconsistency in

approaches across courses, this option is open to Teel, though not any

other of my co-researchers. Grace also referred to a model called the

Patchwork Text (Winter, 2003), written about and developed by Richard

Winter, which has been a significant influence in the development of other

models. The concept of the *Patchwork Text* is to structure tasks in such as

way that the student is required to produce several small pieces of text that

are linked and can be edited and expanded to produce a larger work, thus

helping students to come to an applied understanding of the process of

constructing longer texts. This also reflects the stated aims of *WritingPAD*

in facilitating a range of writing practices more closely linked to practice, as

well as acknowledging the need to scaffold student learning in writing.

If alternative modes of practice to the traditional academic dissertation had

already been developed and implemented in the UK, I wanted to gain some

insights into how this related to my four key issues: historical developments in art

and design education, specifically the adoption of traditional academic practices;

the conception of traditional academic writing as non-inclusive; the current

concerns surrounding the integration of studio practice and critical intellectual

engagement with art and design through discourse, and; the challenge to the

historical dominance of the written word in the context of technological advances

and cultural practices. How did alternative modules address those issues

and link to my three original research questions?All the data that I generated

in response to my fourth question is listed in Appendix 8 (p252) and includes

insights from staff involved in the inception and delivery, and from students

who have chosen to opt for these various models in preference to a traditional

route. The names of all institutions, staff and students are anonymized using the

acronym ADI (Art and Design Institution), followed by a number and referent. This

section acknowledges and documents the work of other academic institutions

in addressing my research question, and further contextualizes my findings and

recommendations in the final chapter.

This new work was influenced by the literature in Chapters Two and

Three. In terms of method, I viewed the example options I found in each

of the five institutions as a separate 'case' (Stake 1995, Yin 2003, Burton

(2000). At this point in the research, I was very dependent on how much

staff or students from each of those institutions might choose to engage

with me, as I was working to relatively tight timescales and the physical

distance between the institutions was not going to allow me the luxury

of visiting in person. I was not attempting to find any generalization

between each case, but rather illuminations into my research questions

in the context of my study. For this reason, the fact that I was not going

to be able to be consistent in the amount or nature of the data collected

across the five institutions did not give me cause for concern. I devised a

set questions that I wanted to ask teaching staff who had been involved

in the design and/or delivery of alternative modes of assessment as a

framework for gathering information (see Appendix 16, p262), knowing

that I would have to rely on opportunity to provide me with the means to

address those questions to the individuals concerned. Some responded

by email, some in telephone interviews, and some I interviewed in

person. Although I had contact details of students from institutions

apart from my own, I received no responses to either telephone calls or

email. Where participating tutors from other institutions had informed

their students about the nature of my research and requested that they

contact me, this also failed to initiate a response. This data in this section

is discussed in full in Chapter Six.

Ethics

My first consideration was to gain approval to conduct the research from the Ethics Committee within my own institution, and I put forward my proposal with reference to the guidelines issued by the Open University, and those of my own institution as the site of the research. As part of this process I composed a letter to prospective volunteer students (Appendix 3, p200). Initially I was concerned that too much information might affect the participants' responses to my questions at interview, but I was guided by Bryman's (2001, as quoted in Burgess et al, 2006:31) four main areas of ethical principles, whether there is: harm to the participants; lack of informed consent; invasion of privacy; or, deception is involved. My main concern was that students should understand that my position on formal writing practices might not reflect those of their tutors, and I advised them to refer to official guidelines in terms of formal assessment or risk compromising their results. In this way, they have an informed choice on whether they are influenced by our discussions.

From an ethical perspective, as a researcher working with students within the site of her employment, there was always the potential problem of students focussing on identifying what they perceived to be inadequacies in the teaching and learning. With that in mind, I needed to be circumspect as to how much of my research could safely be shared with participating students, to ensure that I am not encouraging them to hold views that I may have, or to alter their practice as a result of our interactions in a way that would affect assessment by their tutors and threaten their formal

record of success. As the research progressed, it felt patronizing and detrimental to the trust we had built up not to be open with co-researchers about the rationale behind my research and what I hoped to achieve, especially in view of the work of theirs they had shared with me. I was wary, however, of 'leading' them towards conclusions that are mine rather than their own, and was also mindful of the power relations that exist as a result of my position as a lecturer in the institution, despite not actually teaching them. Silverman (2006:123) captures what I wanted to achieve in a description of the emotionalist approach and emotionalists' 'concern with eliciting accounts of subjective experience' and to obtain a rapport with participants without manipulating them. I do not feel that I ever fully resolved the tension between what to reveal and what not to reveal, but rather that I have tried to manage interactions to focus on ethical considerations of my work impacting upon my co-researchers' approaches to work assessed for their degrees.

There were additional issues to consider in the follow-on study. All participants were assured of anonymity, and I needed to be careful about how much information I presented in this thesis which might reveal the identity of participants or institutions involved. Although I employed similar methods (such as interviews) and participants shared other data sources such as course documentation and exemplars, most contact took place over one or two interactions and did not require the development of comparable levels of rapport as the work with student writers.

A consideration of future work relating to dyslexia

Within both strands of the work, the main study and my research into

alternative models of assessment, the issue of the high incidence of dyslexia

within art and design and the significance of its relationship to the title

of my study and my research questions cannot be ignored or sidelined.

However, within the scope of this study, it has been impossible to afford

it the attention it warrants. During the course of this research, I have also

examined literature on issues for dyslexic students in an art and design

context, the full extent of which has been impossible to include. I have

generated data from interviews with dyslexic students focussing on specific

issues around their experiences in education contexts prior to higher

education, looking at how they have coped in an HE environment, and how

they would develop projects to enhance teaching and learning methods for

dyslexic students which would also benefit all students. I have captured the

data generated from what I was considering at one point to be an additional

strand to this research, in Appendix 9 (p255). Although the research I have

begun in this area is incomplete and in some case extends way beyond the

remit of this work, I present it here in brief to acknowledge its significance

in the context of my study, and to state my intention of expanding upon it in

future work. In addition to this data four of my co-researchers on the main

study (Jane, Tombola, Teel and Pink Jim) had also discussed issues around

their dyslexia with me. In addition the students I had interviewed from ADI3

(my home institution) with regard to alternative modes of assessment, who

had elected to be assessed for the project rather than to write a dissertation,

had both transpired to be dyslexic. The original focus of ADI1 tutor's work

had been to ensure that dyslexic students had an alternative route within

which to more effectively evidence their understanding of contextual

studies in accordance with the Special Educational Needs Disability Act

(SENDA). She had recognized the value of the model and was advocating

its absorption into the mainstream as an option for all students. It is my

intention to utilize this data in future projects.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described the process of research and explained

the thinking behind my decision-making thoughout, with reference

to the relationship that had to influences from the substantive and

methodological literature. In the following chapter I present a vignette

of each of the participants or co-researchers drawing from what I have

discovered about their prior educational experiences in order to provide

the contextual information from which I have drawn in the examination of

the data. An overview of the data is presented in full in Appendix 7 (page

248) and Chapter Five continues by considering each of the research

questions and how the data has contributed insights towards answering

those questions.

Chapter Five

Students' experience

Introducing my co-researchers

This chapter begins by introducing my nine co-researchers to provide a background for the presentation and interpretation of my data. I refer to them using pseudonyms, which they chose for themselves at the beginning of the research. Jane, Emma, Lesley, and Tombola had all taken part in the initial study. I have chosen to present a fairly comprehensive profile of my co-researchers first and then to draw on insights from each person in response to my research questions in the light of key issues and themes discussed in previous chapters.

Jane

Jane was in her second year of study on the BA Fine Art course at the beginning of my research. I had previously taught her on her National Diploma course preceding the degree, which she had attended immediately post GCSE. I was surprised she had volunteered, as she is severely dyslexic. My first interview with Jane took place half way through her second year. At this time she was enthusiastic about her degree course, but was finding it demanding to have to balance working to earn money and fulfilling the commitments to the course. She was more confident about her studio practice than her written work, although she did say that she reads extensively and that this is not a struggle, but writing is something she avoids in every other aspect of her life.

Our next interview took place after I had revised my research question.
I wanted to revisit some areas we had discussed in the light of my new
focus, and in particular about her prior educational experience. I asked
Jane about her ambitions to be a teacher, which she had touched upon
in the previous conversation, and what her own experience of education
had been like. She had spent her secondary education moving between
state schools, which she described as failing to provide the support she
needed for her dyslexia, and fee-paying schools where her experience
had been more positive. She told me that she was considered to be
'slow' at primary school and her parents sent her to a private school
where class sizes were small. With extra support she was able to access
all aspects of the curriculum with relative equity and was diagnosed as
being dyslexic. When she finished at primary school she returned to state
education as it was felt she had caught up and that she would be able to
cope, but she regressed quickly without the extra help and returned to
private education, where she gained good grades at GCSE, which she
attributes to the enormous amount of specialist help she had received.
This had enabled her to develop learning techniques that helped her
survive the National Diploma and Degree course. She described her
relief at being diagnosed as being dyslexic, and she and her family had
thought that there was something 'very wrong' with her, and she thought
she was 'thick'. Others' perception of her as unintelligent and the lack of
awareness about dyslexia perpetuating these judgments is the aspect
of the condition she finds most frustrating. Jane feels that it seriously

undermines her confidence and makes her vulnerable: 'As soon as I start

writing, I just feel like I'm sitting there naked...and everyone's watching

me'. She described having symptoms of panic when writing, such as a

dry mouth and hot neck, especially when under a time constraint. When

I asked if she ever produces uncorrected text, she explained that she

thinks and writes in pictures, and that her notes to herself are almost

like personalized shorthand. We discussed other ways that might be

utilized to create meaning, as well as the notion that it could become the

responsibility of others to extricate meaning, in a similar way to interpreting

and criticizing artwork. Jane immediately drew a parallel between this

practice and our shared experience of attempting to unravel meaning from

complex academic texts, as distinct from texts with complex meaning.

Conversations such as this, in which we jointly explored perspectives of

writing where she, as a dyslexic writer was the expert and could bring

greater insights to issues surrounding my research, were examples where I

felt we were researching together.

During the intervening year since our first interview, she had decided

against teaching, as she felt she was not mature enough to cope with the

sometimes aggressive and rude behaviour she had witnessed in some

of today's young people. At the time of this interview she seemed to be

in a difficult place, as she was even questioning whether she wanted to

pursue a career in anything arts related at all. I asked her why she had

gone into it in the first place. She explained that for her, it was a choice

between art and biology, and the fact that her family were all quite creative

had persuaded her to opt for art. Her inability to write added to other

problems, as she was not even able to explain her work through written

statements to support what she was trying to convey visually. She did

become delightfully animated when we began to discuss Caravaggio, the

subject of her dissertation, talking about him as if he was a contemporary

and was clearly drawing parallels between his practice and her own.

During this discussion, she had a tendency to use Received Pronunciation

when quoting her written texts, and she seemed to feel that she was

required to be a different person in her writing. When she spoke about

the subject of her work, she was coherent, enthusiastic and entertaining,

but this was punctuated with accounts of her struggle to capture this in

written form and her feelings of isolation and being misunderstood, which

seemed to characterize her relationship with writing. This was especially

true of academic writing where her lack of familiarity with the appropriate

vocabulary compounded her difficulties.

Emma and Lesley

Emma and Lesley insisted on being interviewed together and I present

them thus as, although they are individuals, their interactions in our

interviews demonstrated the influence each had over the other's responses

in respect of my research question. For the first interview as part of

the initial study, although they were both present, I interviewed them

separately and transcribed the interviews as separate entities. For their

subsequent interviews, we all agreed that the interview should be a three-

way discussion, as the first interviews had felt stilted, and Emma and

Lesley's interactions with each other were helpful in exploring the issues under discussion. Later transcripts also reflected this. I had taught Emma on her pre-degree course but I had not previously met Lesley, who was persuaded to take part by Emma. They were both in the second year of the BA Fine Art course at the beginning of the research and had continued their education straight from school. In my first interviews with them, Emma told me that she had loved writing when she had been at school and had missed it, especially creative writing and had felt that she was good at it. Lesley also said that she had enjoyed creative writing at school but 'by the time I got to college and university, it wasn't appropriate in my work.' In the second interview when I asked them to talk a little more about their education prior to their current course. Emma told me that she had performed well at school, describing herself as 'quite smart' but adding 'surprising', which might suggest that she did not view herself presenting to others as being intelligent or academic. She had aspired to be a lawyer until she was sixteen, before realising that 'I'm more of a hands on person rather than sitting in lectures all day... sitting in courtrooms.' She had also become aware that there were wider career options in art than she had realised. Lesley had originally wanted to become a doctor, but after her father had remarried, she gained an autistic stepsister and decided that we would like to work in art therapy. She was planning to take a Masters degree to help her move towards that goal. She described herself as having been 'lazy' at school, and found the lack of structure on her current course unhelpful in maintaining her motivation.

Emma and Lesley are flatmates as well as friends, and although they have not shared their writing with each other, their attitudes towards academic writing and observations about the process are inextricably linked through their social proximity and shared experiences. They have another flatmate who did not offer to be a participant in my research, and I have observed that they seem to be inseparable and appear to have very little social interaction with other students. Through observing this self-contained community of practice (Wenger, 1998) informally on campus, I have a strong impression that although this relationship might have provided moral support, it may also have served to maintain the tensions they have clearly felt about being part of an academic community. From interviews their primary aim seems to have been to achieve a good grade, and the quality of the experience of writing and its impact on their practice did not appear to be foremost in their motivation. I felt sad at their lack of enthusiasm. However, some of their descriptions of interactions with tutors were painful accounts in which the social incompatibility between the students and the academic staff was illustrated.

At the beginning of the research, my relationship with Emma and Lesley seemed to be imbued with the power relations between tutor and student that characterized some of the examples Emma and Lesley described in the data. As the relationship developed this was less evident, but never really got to the point where I felt they would be comfortable in challenging ideas I shared with them or have the confidence to bring their own ideas to the research. In that sense their role was more of participant than co-researcher.

Tombola

Tombola was also a second year BA Fine Art student at the start of the

research. From my prior knowledge of Tombola and the first interview, I

had assumed that he would have had a fairly good education and was a

middle class boy, but it took until our second interview to discover that

my original preconceptions were completely wrong. Tombola had worked

for a few years before deciding to pursue his arts education and so he is

a few years older than students who have moved through school straight

to University. I had taught him briefly on his pre-degree course when, after

a week or two, it became obvious that the year-long Foundation Course

(which normally takes students who have undertaken an advanced level

course of study rather than direct from GCSE) was more appropriate for

a student such as Tombola, who had also spent several years painting.

In our first interview just after the start of his second year, he presented

as someone who was highly intelligent, articulate and analytical, and he

had several perceptive critical observations about his course. Despite his

reservations, he had a mature and philosophical approach about how to

deal with the issues he had, and he was certainly not going to allow it to

spoil his enjoyment of the course. We discussed his written work and he

told me that he had always had difficulties with this aspect of his studies.

He had written his two first-year essays with the specific intention of

passing, but other than that he was not concerned with the grade, but

having achieved a pass had boosted his confidence. When I asked him

how closely they were related to his practice, he was slightly critical of

the course as not being structured to enable students to do this easily, but told me that he made sure that it was related. This statement from our first interview encapsulates his attitude 'I'm not really here to impress…an establishment. I'm not too worried about grades, as long as I pass, as long as I know that the kind of work I'm producing is relevant'. Towards the end of the first interview he explained how he had been quite subversive in his latest essay, both in the language he had used and the structure, but had passed with a comparable grade to his other essays and had therefore 'got away with it'. When I read this essay, my primary criticism would have been that his ideas and observations were superficially researched and explored and that he could have presented a much more convincing piece of work with a little more authentic research. However, it had more energy and enthusiasm than many I have read.

In our second interview, which took place on Tombola's territory, and following a number of conversations and having attended his degree show, I gained a much greater insight into Tombola as a person and how he had approached his academic work. Tombola is extremely well informed and well-read and he explained that the writers he most enjoyed reading are those who are unconventional in their style of writing, and this has contributed to his rejection of the conventions of academic writing. Tombola referred to having had an inauspicious educational career at school, which was complicated for him by his negative experiences as a dyslexic. He described some of the practices which characterized his 'support' as a dyslexic pupil in school, such as: being publicly removed

from the classroom to benefit from support; being labelled as having

'special needs'; being coached alongside disruptive children and having

to survive socially in that environment; the focus on the negative aspects

of dyslexia 'at the time it felt like they were trying to CURE you'; and his

realization that the support staff were not always sufficiently qualified.

Tombola's reaction to that was to totally reject the idea that he would ever

go to university, and his experience at school coupled with his working

class background compounded this. His attitude to writing was to practice

'avoidance, absolute avoidance'.

We also discussed his experience of being a dyslexic student in higher

education in which he focused on positive aspects of dyslexia, especially

for an art student. He had spent some time reading and researching

dyslexia and talking to peers, both who were and were not dyslexic in an

attempt to make sense of his own experience. He felt that he possessed a

'heightened sense of spatial awareness' which enables him to be 'able to

see how to put things together without having any of the physical elements

of it there at all' and that his ability to visualize ideas clearly and then to

interpret them creatively was an ability that was hugely advantageous

for an artist. He also recognized that those skills would be useful for

other professions. Tombola felt that his ability in these areas was evident

in his childhood, and was critical of the education system as failing to

recognize and therefore neglecting these attributes. He expressed concern

that some people may lose those abilities forever, and told me that he

had only re-discovered that aspect of his approach to work through re-

entering education after having found the conventions of a traditional working environment restricting. His change of direction followed a period of intense creativity as a painter, in which he acquired an impressive repertoire of knowledge that spans the creative arts.

My discussions, in interviews and informally, with Tombola were insightful and gave me new perspectives on student writing, the impact of prior educational experience and how these relate to my research questions and might impact on my practice as a tutor/assessor. In this sense I did consider Tombola to be a co-researcher through what I felt to be a joint exploration of issues, where there was the space for each challenge the others' assumptions.

Hannah

Hannah was a mature student in her second year of the BA Fine Art course when she joined the research. Hannah had been offered a place on an Art Foundation course at eighteen years old, but had not been supported by her family, who considered Art School to be too 'Bohemian'. She told me that she did not have the 'self-esteem to defy them'. Instead she followed her mother into a nursing career but dropped out after three years to have a baby. When she returned to work, it was as a warden of a nature reserve, which she did for fourteen years until ill health forced her to re-train. She explained that she had always maintained her interest in art and once she decided to return to her original vocation, she was accepted directly onto the degree course. Hannah seemed driven to work as an artist, describing

her decision to go back to Art as a career as 'the thing I'm meant to do'. When she talked about her experience of the course so far when I first spoke to her at the beginning of her second year, she was effusive about finally having the chance to realize her original ambitions.

I interviewed her twice, although the second time I was unable to produce a transcription due to technical difficulties with the tape. I wrote up the second interview in note form, which was disappointing, as the content was quite challenging and it was not able to capture it adequately through note-taking. My experience of transcribing had made me aware of how easy it is to mishear, or to anticipate words that the participant has not actually used, which may alter the interpretation. In addition to the interviews, I had numerous informal interactions through casual encounters on campus and a number of email exchanges, most of which centred on discussions around her dissertation.

In the first interview she described having become part of a small peer group, which might be defined as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) who exchanged ideas about their art work as well as being supportive in the social, conceptual, practical and theoretical areas of their lives. When I asked whether this extended to their writing practices, Hannah needed some encouragement before admitting that this did not happen, comparing sharing written work to 'showing your knickers'. When I pursued this and suggested that it might be helpful to initiate a focus group on writing, Hannah was initially responsive, but was ambivalent when I followed this up with an email, and made it clear that she was not

to be persuaded. At this point in time she was clear that as far as her studio work was concerned, she was enjoying the experience and was less interested in her grades than the work she produced, being 'here for me really'. She was happy to share every written assignment and the assessment feedback with me, which seemed to suggest a lack of self-consciousness, and conflicted with the 'showing your knickers' analogy. Her first essay was highly competent, accurate, beautifully presented, well researched and referenced, clear and well organised, but totally devoid of personal engagement or passion. The feedback she received for the work implied this by suggesting that a more adventurous approach would have enhanced the outcome. Her second essay was written in the same detached, pragmatic style, although she did allow her personal view to become more transparent in the last few paragraphs, an action which was picked up and strongly criticized in the assessment process. In an email communication when she sent me the essays, Hannah told me that, in her first two essays, she had definitely been writing what she thought the tutors would want to read. She also remarked that she had absolutely no interest in the relational aesthetics, the subject of the second essay, and her irritation with the whole subject was fairly evident in her conclusion. She was delighted however to have achieved a high mark.

At the second interview she told me that her grades were not as high in the second stage and dismissed this as being inevitable due to the increasing intellectual demands of a degree course. On examination of her second stage assignments, I began to get the impression that she was caring less about

the outcome. This may have been again, because the subject matter was of little interest to her. However, she still expressed disappointment when her mark was lower than she had anticipated, despite her assertions that her grades were unimportant to her. In her early work, it appeared that she had absorbed all the technical information she had gained through the workshops to produce a 'text-book' essay written wholly with the aim of pleasing the tutor. In her subsequent work, her personal opinions began to be more evident, and yet she seemed to be less able to combine all her technical essay-writing skills of research and critical analysis when she became personally involved in the argument. She agreed that her studio practice and the theory she explores through the written assignments should ideally be related, and had hoped that she would be able to bring theory closer to her practice through her dissertation. In the event, the process became more complicated and this is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

In working with Hannah, I felt I was really sharing her learning journey through the course. She was really interested in my work too, and although at times I felt it necessary to remind her, and myself, of the potential ethical conflicts that too great an involvement might present, her involvement offered a rich study of issues surrounding my research questions. She was quite comfortable in challenging my practice, as an artist, writer and researcher and this helped me to maintain a consciousness of my own subjectivity, both within the site of the research and in a broader context as an artist/writer. In this sense, I regarded her as a co-researcher, a person who has made significant contributions to my examination of the research questions.

Roger

Roger was also a mature student and in his fourth year of a six-year part time BA degree in Fine Art when he joined the research. I have interviewed him twice, but have had a number of informal exchanges with him on campus too. In my first interview with Roger, I gained some insights into his personality, prior experiences, aspirations and motivation. We discussed his arts practice, his experiences of writing and we touched on how he views his identity within the academic community.

Roger described himself as having struggled with the education system as he had difficulty conforming to the demands of authority. He left school with Certificates in Secondary Education and Ordinary levels and became an apprentice engineer, studying for a City and Guilds qualification followed by an Ordinary National Certificate on day release from work. After eight years as an engineer, he opened a tattoo studio where he worked for twenty-five years before enrolling on the Access to Art and Design course, then called the Professional Development Award (PDA). Roger had always worked on creative projects through painting and sculpture, but felt that the course structure and specific demands has made him more self-critical as an artist. He described this experience as having 'opened the world to me' and being inspirational. He has worked as a journalist for publications devoted to motorcycles and tattoo arts, but he is dismissive of this experience in the context of his academic writing: 'it was written about from what you saw and what you knew...erm and from that point of view seems almost inconsequential...compared to what I'm

having to do now'. When I asked him to explain the difference between

knowing and writing about motorcycles and knowing and writing about art

and design, and he highlighted both the language used and the academic

standards required. As an example he said 'like there's no 't's and 'h's

in motorcycles or tattoos'. I found this reference to modes of speech

interesting, as it seems to imply that he perceives a social divide as well as

a difference in genre, and evidence of this can be found in both interviews.

Despite being very articulate and employing a wide and sophisticated

range of vocabulary in our interviews, I have found Roger to be very self-

deprecating. He has a strong Kent accent and he seems to regard his

persona as being incompatible with being academic. I wanted to find out

how he viewed his identity in his written work, if he feels there is room for

his own identity in academic discourse. The first time he assumed I was

talking about his mastery of language and told me that he felt inadequate.

When I revisited the question, he told that he is very conscious of the fact

that his English is 'one step behind academia', and yet admitted that this

perceived deficiency is not evident in the assessment of his essays. Finally,

he joked that he writes as his alter ego, but was serious when he admitted

that he feels this very strongly, and joked again that 'I put the plum in

my mouth'. When I asked him if he felt it was appropriate that we should

expect that, and he told me that he believed that this is what separates

academia from the rest of society and that those standards of education

should be upheld. Later, when I pursued the issue of identity again, he

discussed a critical review he had been required to produced, describing

it as a 'good opportunity to defend some of my own words and opinions'
although he said 'I'm terribly scared about putting my own opinions in
from this...this academic writing point of view' saying he was not confident
that he can substantiate them. Although Roger has stated this explicitly,
I get a strong sense that this may be an issue with Hannah too, and the
reason why her later work in which her own opinions begin to surface is
less academically competent than when she merely presents the opinions
of other researched sources. In contrast to Hannah, he did not give me
access to any of his written work until the later stages of the research.
Although he did not refuse to let me see it, he did not facilitate it either. I
could have pursued it but chose not to because I had a strong impression
that he was uncomfortable with the idea.

When we have discussed whether he would like to see other modes of
assessment to evidence intellectual engagement with the subject, Roger
is resistant and dismissive. It is my overwhelming impression that the
mastery of academic discourse is an important part of his personal and
professional agenda. In our second interview he told me that the grades he
is achieving for his written work are steadily improving and that he feels he
is progressing. In his first interview he was critical of the lack of feedback
he was receiving for his written work and cited one example where he had
the opportunity for a one-to-one tutorial to discuss a marked assignment
as being extremely valuable. In the second interview, we were discussing
feedback again and he told me that he found it difficult to decipher. I asked
him if he would like the opportunity to have a one-to-one to go through

it, but he said 'possibly, possibly not. I've, I've...the improvement on last year's marks...erm, I'm almost happy to kind of...just let it go'. There is a dichotomy here between his desire to improve which is evident through our conversations, and the lack of confidence pervading his experience of education. I felt that Roger placed such a high value on his conception of academic writing and was not at all receptive to any critique of it, nor of the value or opportunities offered by any alternative modes. His lack of confidence dissuaded me from pursuing some of my areas of enquiry too rigorously with him, as he already seemed quite vulnerable, although I had a number of unanswered questions from our interactions. This encouraged me to revisit my position as the researcher. Although the motivation for my research was political and I am critical of many of the traditional conceptions of academic writing which mirror Roger's view of it, my position here is to tell his story and represent his view, not necessarily to seek to change it. Although, in one sense, this made Roger less of a co-researcher and more a participant, in another he helped me to think about my personal agenda in the context of the research and properly consider his experience with reference to my research questions.

We talked about his proposal for the dissertation, and discussed the inconsistencies in the way this was introduced in the briefing, and the general lack of cohesion in what is communicated through the tutors. In the second interview, he seemed to have a clear idea of what he intended, but in a later conversation, he told me that he had lost his direction and re-thought the whole concept. For the first time since I had been working

with him, he referred to his support tutor who was helping him to sort out his ideas, and explained that he found organising his ideas and keeping on track was problematic due to his schizophrenia.

Teel

Teel has a very different attitude towards her education and approach to her work, which is probably partly due to her cultural background in Scandinavia, but the contrast might also be attributed to being the only student participant on the BA Honours course in Interior Architecture and Design, all other co-researchers being students of Fine Art. In my first interview with her when she had just begun her second year of study, she admitted she was still 'scared' but felt that she was progressing. She is respectful and unquestioning towards the tutors, and accepts that if she is required to do a task to fulfil her commitments to the course she must do it, and complete it by the deadline. She told me she likes the working practices at the University, the discipline of having to get work done and to have creative freedom to develop ideas, an ability she feels she has improved since the start of the course. She gave me very little detail about her education in Finland, except to say that she had been studying 'different things for short periods' and that she felt she had now finally found the right course for her. The areas of study she had tried in Finland were Fine Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design. When we began to talk about her writing practices she told me she uses writing to capture and process her thoughts, and that she is actually more confident in her writing skills than her drawing. She described this as being a 'burden' and

implies that she would prefer to be able to do this through drawing. We

discussed the challenge of writing in second language, and she told me

that she reads extensively in English to help her to improve. Unlike the

other student participants, and ironically as it is not her first language, Teel

is happier with her written skills than with her studio practice saying 'I think

that without my writing...nobody would have been impressed'. We talked

about her latest written assignment, in which she comparing the language

of classical architecture to the sonnet and I asked if she would allow me

to read it, but she said 'let's see how it turns out'. I spoke to her informally

after the essay had been assessed and discovered she had achieved

a good grade. Her feedback echoed what she already knew – that the

beginning of the essay was better than the conclusion – but she explained

that this was because she had run out of time. The grade she had achieved

seemed to give her the confidence to allow me to see the work. I asked her

whether she had worked with any other students, and she told me that she

had worked with one person, but only because he was struggling with the

assignment and she had reached a point where it was progressing well.

She admitted that she would have been less willing to work with him had

the positions been reversed. She also told me that she had suspected that

she might be dyslexic and had decided to be tested.

In our second interview, she repeated her assertion that she uses writing and

words to organise her thoughts. She explained that she was able to visualise

her creative outcomes in her head, and she used writing to describe and

capture what she visualised. She also said that she thought and wrote in

English, because she would have to relate what she done in English. I found

this interesting as it reminded me of some of the conversations I've had with

dyslexic students, in which they describe their particular ability to visualise

three dimensionally, often having a well-developed vision of a final outcome

without consciously working through a process to get there. Teel is not an

entirely typical example, as she appears to be using language –albeit not her

first language - to facilitate the visualisation of her design work. In addition,

her initial dyslexia test result was inconclusive and she had decided not to

pay to have an official assessment.

Pink Jim

Pink Jim and Earnel are the only students who were in their first year of

study on the BA Fine Art course when they volunteered to participate

in the research, and they are also the youngest students. Working with

them enabled me to get a sense of the first year experience. Encouraging

students in Stage One to participate has been the most difficult group to

involve in my research, and it was only my previous contact with Pink Jim as

tutor on her National Diploma course that prompted her to volunteer, and it

was she who persuaded Earnel to take part, but other peers have declined.

Pink Jim left her non-selective secondary school (for students who choose

not to take, or fail to pass, the Kent Test, once known nationally as the

eleven-plus) after taking GCSEs and enrolled onto the National Diploma. I

have known Pink Jim since her first year on the National Diploma course,

and she considers that she has become more confident in her studio work

over that period, but she feels that lack of confidence in her academic

ability is a result of her negative experiences at school, specifically as a

result of being 'labelled' as being less able as a result of her dyslexia. She

told me her parents had considered sending her to a private school rather

then a non-selective state school, but they had decided against it, and

she felt that she might have done better at a private school. This mood

changed as soon as we began to discuss her current arts practice, when

Pink Jim became animated and enthusiastic as she described her new-

found love of photography, especially traditional darkroom processes and

the kinaesthetic nature of the work. She was very happy to have received

lower second grades for each unit of studio practice on the course so far,

and had addressed issues in her timekeeping and organisational skills

which had threatened her progress on the National Diploma course. She

had also managed to forge productive friendships which she felt were

supportive, something which had been difficult before due to aspects of

her personal life which had been prohibitive.

Earnel

Earnel had a grammar school education and studied English, Psychology

and History at Advanced level as well as Art, so she has a stronger grounding

in academic writing than any of the other participants. As with Pink Jim, I

have only interviewed her once although we have spoken about her progress

informally. She described her secondary education as tightly structured and

disciplined, and she experienced difficulties in adapting to the less restrictive

art college culture in her pre-degree Foundation year and felt she under-

performed. Having gained a place on an Illustration course, she decided that she wanted to paint and managed to transfer her offer to Fine Art.

When I interviewed her she expressed her excitement about her new course, saying 'my brain is in hyperdrive'. She felt inspired and motivated and this was reflected in the grades she was achieving. Despite having originally planned to go into journalism, Earnel told me that she writes very little now, apart from the recent essay, although she enjoys writing and said 'it always comes quite naturally' and she that 'coming back here and doing all the crit reviews and essays and stuff has got me back into it'.

My co-researchers were volunteers and there was no selection process. They had come to their art and design courses at different points in their lives from a variety of occupational and social backgrounds. Despite this diversity, strong themes emerged linking their on course experiences in relation to the research questions. I return to my research title 'Is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art students' practice?' With close reference to this as the overarching question I will systematically present my data and how I have interpreted this in response to the sub questions I identified in the introductory chapter. Inevitably there is some overlapping of material and links between the sub questions.

What is the function of academic writing in a higher education art and design context?

Before I look to the data to examine how my co-researchers regard the function of academic writing, I will briefly draw on aspects of the literature

to signpost its stated function, in an art and design context, as defined in

national guidelines and more locally in our own course documents. The joint

preface of the subject benchmark statements for art and design (A and D) and

the history of art, architecture and design (HAAD) (QAAHE 2002) states that

> art and design graduates will acquire knowledge and understanding
> of the critical and conceptual dimensions of their discipline, master
> the communication and information skills, and develop the critical
> awareness required to learn and articulate their learning in this area.

Within the entire document, there is no specific requirement for these aims

to be achieved through academic writing, although the common use of the

dissertation is referred to as a commonly used vehicle to achieve some of

the criteria. A committee of highly respected academics who represent A

and D and HAAD education nationally compiled the document.

The absence of direct reference to academic writing in the subject

benchmark document makes it clear that its inclusion in art and design

course requirements is an institutional decision, and can even be decided

at programme level. Examples of institutions and programmes within

institutions offering alternative modes of assessment are presented later in

the next chapter. The students who took part in my research did not appear

to be aware of any choice as to how the specific elements of the course

aligned to the dissertation are evidenced. If they consulted their course

guide, they would be aware that there are options, and they would also be

aware that they have the right to negotiate an alternative form of assessment

if they are dyslexic or have any special educational needs in line with the

institution's alternative assessment policy. The 'accepted' format for the qualification as comprising a 30-credit dissertation is so embedded in the culture of the institution that I doubt whether staff, let alone students, are even aware of alternative options. With reference to the learning outcomes, the function of the unit is to enable the student to:

- explore in depth a subject-related academic enquiry showing an understanding of its historical, theoretical or critical context

- demonstrate an ability to select, manage and integrate information from a variety of sources

- demonstrate the ability to analyse and evaluate sources, and use them to develop and support a clear cogent and sustained argument in written form

- demonstrate an ability to communicate ideas and information clearly in written form and to obey academic conventions (e.g. references, illustrations, bibliography, appendices)

(from the dissertation unit descriptor reproduced in full in Appendix 2.)

The preface of the subject benchmark statement asserts that:

> The primary aim of learning in Art and Design disciplines is to
> prepare students for professional, creative practice. Traditionally,
> it has also required some supporting study of works of other
> practitioners past and present to enable students to acquire
> knowledge and understanding of the historical context of practice
> in their own discipline(s), as well as to support the development of
> some key skills.

This aligns well to the learning outcomes for the dissertation unit which my co-researchers have undertaken or will undertake, but this does not explain why academic writing is cited as the most appropriate means through which to evidence the first three learning outcomes, nor explain why the evidence must be presented 'in written form'. There is a lack of any explicit stated link between academic writing and art and design education in either national or institutional documents.

As may be expected, my co-researchers' views of the function of academic writing vary. Roger has done some freelance journalistic work for specialist motorcycling and tattoo magazines but he is dismissive of his writing skills in respect of academic work. Roger seems to experience conflicting attitudes to academic writing. On one hand, he considers academic writing as the gold standard to which he aspires, and yet he shares the view expressed by several co-researchers in resenting the time spent on writing, which takes him away from his studio work which might suggest that he does not view it as contributing to his arts practice. Jane echoes this view in saying that she had enrolled on the course 'to make art not to write essays', a sentiment with which Emma and Lesley concurred in their interviews. Generally, even when co-researchers were happy to rise to the challenge of academic writing, there is a sense that it is simply an accepted part of a degree that they must reluctantly endure as a means to an end.

Tombola made sure his writing related to his arts practice, but had it not been a course requirement to produce it, he would not have done so from choice, and he deviated as far from academic conventions as he dared in

order to get a pass, however low. None of my co-researchers independently identified any function of academic writing specifically that enhanced, or linked to, their arts education, except for Earnel. In discussion of the content of her essay at interview, I had asked Earnel how closely it related to her practice, and although she said it was not obviously linked, she was able to view it as a positive activity which encouraged her to expand her experience and ideas, which she acknowledged would enhance her arts practice. She was able to conceptualize the relationship between researching artists and historical contexts as an academic exercise, and the potential this had to influence her own practice, even in the absence of explicit links. This reflects the arbitrary inclusion of academic writing into art and design education as a result of regulation imposed on its absorption into mainstream degree level study and in the mid seventies. The model was adopted from other disciplines as being the accepted mode of evidencing the level of intellectual engagement with the subject that would justify the award, and at that time, this probably seemed to be the most appropriate option.

Hannah was less fazed by the prospect of academic writing, but she too had past experience through her nursing course. She, like Earnel, had to remember the process after many more years absence from education, but she had a practical approach to this, and told me she had attended every library seminar about academic writing, and although she was neither confident or enthusiastic about it, she viewed it as something she had signed up to as part of the course, and her initial approach was to make the best of it. She did not appear to view academic writing as having any function

apart from this. She was confident enough to access help through the library seminars, possibly because she had prior knowledge of academic writing and regarded it as an exercise in revision. As a result, her first essay conformed to expectations perfectly and she received a high mark, only criticized by the tutor marking the work for being unadventurous. Returning to Wood's (2000:52) conception of the purpose of orthodox academic writing as being to 'enable the writer to celebrate his/her non-tacit knowledge of the topic and win approval from senior academicians' begs the question as to why the work would also need to be adventurous. This signals that perhaps the function of writing in art and design should go beyond a demonstration of knowledge and this is discussed in more detail as this chapter develops.

Apart from Earnel, only Teel had a clear view of her academic writing as having a function in the development of her work. Looking through the transcripts of her interviews, I noticed a note I had written while I had been applying the identified themes to my coding: 'really difficult to draw parallels between Teel's interviews and others – far fewer common points of reference'. In my first interview with her, she seemed to have a greater confidence in her writing than her arts practice as this extract demonstrates:

T   I think at the moment I am a better writer than drawer....

R   Yeah

T   ...which is also kind of a burden for me because I am processing my thoughts in written form

R   Do you use write...writing in your artwork? Does that come into your artwork sometimes?

T   Partly.

R   Hmm... and this part ... kind of as a decoration or as a kind of...
         reminder.. or... what role does it sort of play?

T   I don't really know...

R   Hmm

T   .... I use it differently.

I wanted her to try to identify what the role of writing was within her work
and if there was a relationship between this and her practice. A little later
in the conversation, I asked her if she felt there was any room for her own
sense of her self in her formal writing:

T   Hmm... yeah I think... I think yes but it means the more you
         know the more you can get yourself into that...

R   Hmm

T   ...do you know what I mean?

R   Yeah

T   Then I think you are more free...

R   Hmm

T   ... but then I think that's to do with all the art forms, all
         the...not art forms... formal text is not really an art form, but
         when you are creating something...

R   Hmm, hmm

T   ... the more you know, the more freely you can do it.

Teel appears to appreciate that the more knowledgeable she is about her
subject, the greater the authority she will have as an individual to bring
her own voice to the argument. This, and the emphasis she places on the
importance of reading, implies that she may regard the function of academic

writing as a discipline through which to undertake research, organize her thoughts about her subject and thereby earn the authority to express her self. It is interesting that she does not consider academic writing as an art form, despite the parallels she draws between the need to acquire knowledge as an enablement for free expression in both writing and arts practice. In the essay she is working on at the point of our first interview entitled *How can parts of a building act like words in a sentence?* she skilfully compares classical architecture with the structure of the sonnet, drawing on appropriates sources from the literature as well as managing to express her own conclusions. In one section she draws on two quotations, one referring to writing and one to architecture, highlighting the interchangeability between process, which reminded me of the two examples presented by Orr and Blythman (2004) in Chapter Two (page 45). With her permission, I reproduce an extract from Teel's commentary following the quotes she has referenced in her essay, where her own voice comes through strongly:

> These quotes, although one is talking about writing and the other about architecture, could be describing either of the subjects discussed on this paper. The five orders in classical architecture and prescribed form of the sonnet are there to set the guidelines rather than confine the creativity of an artist. The reason or goal to achieve with these orders is harmony. Harmony is the essence of both, classical architecture and sonnet. Mathematical orders and ratios are only tools, helping an artist to achieve it.

Her comments during the interview and this extract might possibly be applied to her view of the function of academic writing: as a tool through which to achieve harmony and coherence in her creative work.

In what kinds of ways does the students' prior educational experience impact on their ability to engage with academic writing in their course?

What begins to emerge from the data is the suggestion that engagement with the contextualization of practice through academic writing is a more effective option for those most familiar with the requirements. Greenbank and Penketh (2009:464) highlighted the importance of considering students' prior writing experiences to as providing contextual links to the way they approach their dissertations. Lillis (2001:53) introduces the concept of an 'institutional practice of mystery' around academic writing which limits the capability of non-traditional students less familiar with it. Lesley was clearly mystified and expressed her frustration thus:

> I found myself being deeply confused and anxious on the course. The reason being because the course was full of ambiguity, the course structure was unclear, the grading and feedback was contradictory and bewildering and I found that I didn't know what they wanted or what I needed for grades.

Lesley explained that this had an adverse effect on her attitude to creative practice as well as being a source of frustration and discontent. Lesley and Emma (who were interviewed together) in particular have given me a greater sense of feeling like outsiders in an academic environment. There are numerous examples in the transcripts where the inaccessibility of the language is mentioned and awkwardness in their relationships with teaching staff due to ambiguities in communication.

Speaking about her writing, Lesley expressed concerns about her spelling and grammar and her frustration that although tutors were critical, she

did not know how to put it right and she was never given feedback that would help. She said 'how do you start writing academic if that's not what you're used to? It's like...false...feels like you're completely bullshitting.' Emma concurred with 'I haven't got a clue where I'm going wrong.' Both students expressed a desire to have comprehensive and staged feedback and were clearly not confident that they have acquired the necessary academic writing skills prior to degree level study. I asked them if they had ever accessed help through the library or study skills advisor. It was clear that they had not, and they seemed embarrassed and unable to articulate why. Other responses about group sessions gave me the impression that co-researchers who were not confident in their academic writing skills seemed concerned about attending the seminars on academic writing for fear their lack of knowledge would be exposed and become a source of embarrassment as were some of the seminars.

Pink Jim's experience of secondary education in a non-selective school had not been very positive, and she left after taking GCSEs. Her experience of learning was very different to Earnel's as she describes:

P   ... it was er that I don't know if you were a bit... it felt a bit
        like that if you were...not as good as the rest, you didn't get
        as much attention...that's all you know

R   mm...

P   ... and like I was really bad at Maths... and I'm not
        particularly good at English either...so it sort of affected me
        like that...

She had not entered higher education with the confidence or skills to

engage with writing on the same level as Earnel. She was reluctant to ask for help, justifying her avoidance by explaining that she would have to do it on her own in the future. She was particularly pleased at having handed her essay in on time on the day of the interview, although she admitted that it was this that had caused her the most problems so far: 'all these…bloody great words that I don't really understand'. She explained that she found the amount of reading necessary problematic for her and that some of the tutors' lectures were inaccessible. When I asked her if she ever requested clarification, she said she was reluctant, always assuming that everyone else in the group would have understood. This sense of isolation in the writing process and lack of confidence was commonly documented amongst my co-researchers within the data. This is in sharp contrast to the practice of sharing work, which is more typical of creative practice.

Within the group of nine co-researchers, it was only Earnel who expressed the view that she was quite familiar and comfortable with academic writing. Over the course of the research I realized that she was the only co-researcher who had come to the course with a good grounding in academic writing. This enabled her to make sense of it and use it as a means to achieve the broader learning outcomes of the course and subscribe to it as a process as this extract from the interview demonstrates:

E   Yeah. It was really cool and … I think it's like good to write anyway…

R   Hmm

E   … even if it's an art college and you always hear people say 'it's an art college, this isn't why I come here, I don't want to

work'... like... it's still good because it's another way of...
like... expressing your ideas...

She made it clear from the interview that she had not always felt so positive
about her academic writing, so perhaps she had already been through the
stage of mystification at an earlier stage in her academic career:

E	Yeah that's it, but...I used to be like that... when we had... erm.. art history lessons....
R	Hmmm
E	...once a week... at school. I'd be (shakes head) my God this is horrible...
R	Yeah
E	... but I've sort of learnt...
R	...well you must be pretty used to writing essays...
E	Yeah
R	... cos those options... ALL are essays...
E	Hmmm
R	...are all like essay stuff, aren't they
E	Yeah it was really good cos as I was like... going through... cos I'd totally forgotten how to... like write an essay...
R	Hmm
E	... and what the processes were and... as I was doing it was like 'oh yes okay, and now I do this...'

Other co-researchers, although they expressed huge concerns over their
confidence and ability when engaging in academic writing, had different
strategies for coping. They did not appear to feel so overtly alienated from
the academic environment as Emma, Lesley and Pink Jim, but their lack of

skill and experience in academic writing caused them anxiety and confusion. Roger admitted that he had never really fitted into the academic environment as he had trouble conforming 'to the demands of authority', and did not see himself as an academic, but it was something to which he aspired. Having decided that he wanted to acquire access to academia, he was prepared to be compliant in order to achieve this. Contrary to Lillis' (2001) advocacy of placing a value on students' cultural and social backgrounds and drawing on this to contextualize learning, Roger seemed to feel that his responsibility was to adapt in order to be accepted into the academic environment. There are more parallels to be drawn here with Ivanič's (1998) exploration of identity in student writing. Roger described his journalistic writing for tattoo and motorcycle publications as 'being written from what you saw and what you knew', something which allowed him his own sense of identity in the writing. When I asked him how he thought academic writing differed, he highlighted the language and academic standards as the fundamental difference, but he also attributed verbal linguistic features when he joked 'there's no 't's and 'h's in motorcycles and tattoos.' The implication is that there are social and cultural differences as well as conventions of writing. Roger has a strong Kentish accent and he seems to regard his persona as a heavily tattooed member of the motorcycling fraternity as being incompatible with being academic. He joked that his strategy for writing is to write as his alter ego, but was serious when he admitted that he feels this very strongly, and joked again that 'I put the plum in my mouth'. When I asked him if he felt it was appropriate that this might be expected, he told me that he believed that this is what separates

academia from the rest of society and that those standards of education should be upheld. The phenomenon of changing voice also occurred in Jane's interviews, where she had a tendency to use received pronunciation when she was quoting her written texts. It could be argued that sociolinguistic practices of accommodating speech to suit particular companions in a given situation is commonplace in most of our lives and can be justified when considering the sensibilities of an individual. Perhaps Roger parallels this practice with his compliance with academic discourse.

Jane and Tombola are dyslexic, which obviously exacerbates their difficulties over academic writing, which are quite apart from their social and educational backgrounds, and they both indicated high levels of anxiety surrounding that aspect of the course. Jane takes advantage of the educational support staff in helping her to cope with her dyslexia in the context of her course. She was working closely with the dyslexia advisor and had established patterns of working, such as use of colour coding, that she had developed throughout her education. She made the point that she had enrolled on the course 'to make art not to write essays.' I was reminded of Orr et al (2004:75) and their assertion that for many students art is 'a curriculum choice that is connected to a rejection of writing as there is a desire to express themselves through another media.' For Jane, this stems from embarrassment about her writing, and she indicates she will use it in a sketchbook, which would normally be a private workspace, but even then is afraid of anyone seeing it:

Jane   I do write quite a lot in my sketchbook, but I'm a bit
        scared of it...

R   Hmmm

Jane   ... because my spelling is SO atrocious that if anyone read
through it they'd think I'm a five year old...

She did say that she reads extensively and that this is not a struggle, and
spoke about her confidence in her ability to express herself verbally. She
was frustrated that she was not able to do justice to her intelligence and
knowledge in her essays:

Jane   I mean I... a perfect example... had my last unit we
had to do... half of it was an essay and half of it was a
presentation...

R   Hmm, hmm

Jane   ... and I got 75% for the presentation, and I got something
like 50% for the essay...

R   Yeah

Jane   ... and that was after my dyslexic tutor had gone through it
over and again with me...

Her comments here echo a point made in an interview I conducted with a
course leader in our own institution, who introduced a project option for his
own students on BA Interior Architecture, examined in more detail in Chapter
Six. He felt that there were many very able students who were not able to
demonstrate their ability and realize their full potential in a written form, and
raised issues over equity.

Tombola seemed less angry and appeared to have adopted a more
philosophical approach to his problem, although he told me that he
had dreaded his dissertation from the moment he chose to enrol on the

National Diploma course until the date of his submission. He chose not to

seek any institutional help and explained that this was due to the negative

experiences of dyslexia support at school, in particular the remedial model

to which he had been subjected. He is extremely well read, informed and

passionate about his subject, and his creative practice achieved recognition

from staff for being strong. He was aware that, as far as achieving the

degree, this would compensate for weaker marks for his writing and

accepted it. When I read his dissertation I found it stimulating and could see

important influences and link to his practice. He had obviously read widely,

but his failure to capture this in his referencing and to obey the conventions

of the dissertation genre compromised the grade he achieved, which was

documented in the feedback. Tombola's failure to reach his potential and

to have his knowledge and ability recognized and celebrated was clearly

affected by his prior experiences in education, which contributed to his

reluctance to seek help from support staff. His experience also raised

questions for me about assessment, and how much weighting was given

to the individual learning outcomes. I had the impression that Tombola

was penalised for his deficiencies in applying the conventions of academic

writing to a greater extent than he was acknowledged for the breadth and

depth of his knowledge and contextualization of his subject.

I compared this to Emma's dissertation, in which her adherence to the

conventions of academic writing was much closer, but the content of

her thesis was superficial by comparison and even inaccurate in places.

Interestingly, Emma achieved a higher grade for her work, although both

students had struggled with it. Tombola had no interest in subscribing to the conventions of academic writing and accepted that his grade would be compromised as a result. His priority was that his writing would contribute to his practice and he would derive benefit from articulating his knowledge and he undertook that task in almost total isolation from both tutors and peers. He expressed irritation with the conventions and the rigidly prescribed format for presentation and style, and felt restricted by it. If he had felt more able to engage with others in discussion of the work, I feel there would have been opportunities to convince him to adopt a more thorough approach to his research. This might have enhanced the content and aligned to his personal objectives for the work, not just the conventions. The negative experiences of his past interactions in the educational environment affected his engagement with academic writing. Tombola's approach to his academic work did allow him an element of control, but this was at the expense of his grade. He refused to compromise his own identity, nor to be constrained by producing work purely to please his tutors and accepted the consequences. Ivanič (1998) and Wood (2000) discuss the dilemma student writers face in having to anticipate their readers' responses to their texts and make judgements as to how much they need to accommodate the predicted criticisms, highlighting the power that the assessor holds over this process.

In analyzing Tombola's story, I was struck by a loss of opportunity. Tombola had considered his dilemma, and had made attempts to present his perspective to his tutors in discussion of academic work preceding his dissertation. He said he had rejected their involvement because he felt they

had tried to impose ideas, specifically around content, which failed to reflect the direction of his arts practice and to which he did not subscribe. In his accounts at interview, there appeared to be an absence of negotiation and thoughtful consideration of the students' perspective. Ruddock and Fielding (2006:227) describe the capacity '...to be surprised by students' insights and capabilities and not dismissive of their thinking.' (see page 37) as one of the defining features of an organizational structure where the student voice has a place, which Tombola felt to be absent. In Tombola's view, his tutors positioned themselves as the authority, and expected him to concede to their opinions, rather than providing the space to learn together (Freire,1972). This runs counter to the concept of a liberating education, and Tombola had clearly felt it necessary to practice avoidance of his tutors as opposed to engaging in dialogue with them, which seems to suggest that he found their interactions oppressive.

Hannah also experienced a conflict between what she wanted to write and what her tutors expected from her. Despite having greater understanding and experience of academic writing than Tombola, she was faced with the same dilemma when she was writing her dissertation. Her attitude to academic writing seemed to have changed when I interviewed her about her work in her second year of study. At the second interview she told me that her grades were not as high in the second stage and dismissed this as being inevitable due to the increasing intellectual demands of a degree course. On examination of her second stage assignments, I began to get the impression that she was caring less about the outcome, and to some

extent was engaging in the 'tick box' culture that I had encountered in

Emma and Lesley's attitude to their writing. This may be easier to explain

when the subject matter is of little interest to her, as in the case of two of her

essays. In her early work, it appeared that she had absorbed all the technical

information she had gained through the workshops to produce a 'text-book'

essay written wholly with the aim of pleasing the tutor. In her subsequent

work, her personal opinions began to be more evident, and yet she seemed

less able to combine all her technical essay-writing skills of research and

critical analysis when she became involved in the argument. I was reminded

of Raein's (2003) article reviewed in the literature where he highlights the

incompatibility of denying the 'I' in writing practices associated with art and

design when the 'I' is a central part of creative practice. Hannah proved

she had the ability to produce a piece of academic writing, and yet she

seemed less able to do so when she included aspects of her own identity

in the work. Traditionally, the 'I' has been excluded from academic writing,

and students of fine art at my institution are still directed to write in the

third person. At this point in time she was proposing to examine theoretical

issues around feminism and motherhood in art history and theory as the

subject of her dissertation. She was hoping that this would give her a greater

motivation to write as they were recurring themes in her arts practice and

would inevitably involve a much closer personal engagement with her

subject as well as providing the contextual academic links. The problem

remained as to how she might manage to incorporate her identity as an

artist within the required academic structure.

My next contact with her was when she emailed me asking for advice.

She had abandoned her first idea as her studio work had taken a different

direction and she had moved her dissertation along the same lines. The

email was long and the story complicated detailing a dilemma she was

having regarding the submission of her dissertation, and requesting advice

on what to do. Following a tutorial with her tutor, she felt she had two

clear choices: either producing a dissertation to please her tutor or one to

please herself, and like Tombola, to risk having to accept a lower grade at

assessment. I replied to say it would be inappropriate for me to advise her

to take one or other course of action and that she herself had identified the

likely consequences of either action. The issue was not directly related to

my research question, and was potentially so vast it could be the focus of an

entire research project, as it concerned the subjective nature of critiquing the

visual arts and the tutor-student power relations which exist in this context.

It appeared to me that Hannah was locked in an intellectual battle with her

tutor, and she felt her own arguments had been rigorously researched and

presented but her tutor did not agree with those arguments.

Hannah is an example of a student who began with the drive and motivation

to engage in the academic writing element of the course to the best of her

ability despite her reservations, but has found the constraining elements of

the genres (essay and dissertation) and the pressure to write what her reader

(her tutor) required was incompatible with her creative practice. I consider

this to be a something of a tragedy, because her story suggests that she

could have utilized writing as an important reflective tool to link historical,

contemporary and contextual aspects of art and design practice to her own

work in a way which would have significantly enhanced her own practice.

She demonstrated that she was able to learn and successfully apply the

conventions of academic writing through the support offered, mostly by

the library and learning staff and related this to her practice. In her case, it is

both the content of her studio practice and her writing that she feels has been

directed in such as way that all sense of her identity as an artist and a writer

has been lost.

Her story also highlights problems in communication with tutors, and the

apparent lack of common ground or a space for negotiation of ideas and

values where students could feel their perspectives were respected. When

Hannah was struggling with what she clearly viewed as either being true to

her self, or compromising that by pleasing her tutor to secure a good grade

I had a number of email exchanges with her. In one of these, I suggested

that her tutor might feel that her subject matter (spirituality in painting) might

lack grounding in literature that would be accepted as a credible source.

She immediately refuted this, insisting that her research and referencing

absolutely conformed to academic standards, and that she had presented

a cogent argument examining and referencing a range of perspectives. My

knowledge of her work and her intellectual prowess convinced me that this

was highly probable, although I had not seen it. She was adamant that the

conflict was present because she had taken a particular position within the

research with which her tutor did not agree, a difference in opinion. She was

angry that the tutor had power and authority which she saw as diminishing

her own voice within her research. Ivanič (1998) asserts that in order for a

student to have a voice, they need to know what can be said and how it can

be articulated. Hannah was adamant that she understood the discourse, but

the social and cultural differences between herself and her tutor had forced

a situation where the power of the tutor's position marginalized her identity

in, what she then perceived to be, a socially oppressive environment. Ivanič

also questions how much of the own identities students are permitted to

bring to higher education and how much they have to assume a false or

double identity. The issue of whether the academic writing contributes

towards the maintenance of existing power relations in education in

embedded in the question of whether academic writing is inclusive. This is

far too complex an issue to be adequately addressed within this research.

For this reason, although I make reference to it in the context of the other

research questions, I have not devoted a separate section to answering it. The

example I have given regarding Hannah illustrates how this might happen.

There are numerous others from the data where it might be argued that the

identity of the tutor is situated within the historically dominant social group

in education and this causes a mismatch between what a student wishes to

articulate and what is permitted. Frequently these occur within interactions

between tutors and students in tutorials, seminars, lectures or in feedback,

formal or informal. The importance of the social relationship between them

also comes to the fore. Mayfield (2005) urges more attention to be paid

to the emotional experience of students, and Austerlitz's (2008) anthology

explores the importance of emotions and social interactions particularly

in creative practice-based learning. Within the anthology Lioy (2008:163) emphasises the importance her writing workshops had in helping students to 'understand their equality'. Presumably this helps empower students to challenge attempts to marginalise the legitimacy of their identities within their educational setting from a critical and informed stance and this echoes Lillis' (2001) recommendations for re-thinking academic writing. There are also issues emanating from occasions when the tutor or student does not have a shared language, and one or both fail to understand the other.

In his first interview, Roger described his difficulties in 'deciphering' the meaning of written feedback for essays, and expressed his preference for a one-to-one tutorial discussion to give him the opportunity for clarification. In the subsequent interview, however, when he told me his marks for written work were improving, I asked him if he would still welcome the opportunity to discuss the assignment in more detail. He replied 'possibly, possibly not.... I'm almost happy to kind of...just let it go.' His reluctance to engage in discussion with his tutor did not suggest that the relationship between them was open and productive, nor conducive to deeper understanding.

Neither Emma nor Lesley had anything positive to say about their interactions or relationships with tutors. They highlighted the inaccessibility of the language used by some tutors in lectures. When I asked whether they ever asked for clarity, Lesley said that she had on one occasion, but the interaction had resulted in a communication deadlock, illustrated by the following extract from the interview:

> Lesley ...and the language was harder to understand than younger tutors basically. It was a lot of jargon...

R   Right.

Lesley ...and erm she didn't really seem to understand that WE didn't understand her and kind of got frustrated with us not being able to understand her... and it wasn't just a few of us, it was the whole group didn't understand what she was saying.

R   How did she deal with that?

Lesley She just carried on with it and we ended up just sitting there.

R   Well how did you deal with it? What was your... response? What was your reaction. Did you kind... she KNEW... did she know you weren't getting it?

Lesley Yeah, but it got to the point where it was just easier just to go along with it, cos she had a ... kind of trying to explain it and then getting muddled up and getting confused, cos we didn't understand it... and it was just one of those things where it was easier just to... kind of make notes and try to... fight your way through her words kind of thing...

She described this as being so acutely embarrassing for both the tutor and the students, that she was discouraged from ever doing it again. Some of their descriptions of interactions with tutors were painful accounts in which the social incompatibility between the students and the academic staff was evident. They described feelings of intimidation with some tutors, which also prevented them from seeking help. At one point Lesley asserts 'I prefer to be independent', but this follows on from an account of meetings with her tutor being difficult:

> So when he is in and you want to go speak to him it just makes him awkward...but I don't know, I know there's been a few complaints about him, but I just kind of stay out of the way. I prefer not to go in than to go in and just be awkward kind of thing.

Emma also revealed that the same tutor has made students cry in tutorials. Both students were highly critical about the support and feedback they had received in the process. They were particularly angry that advice given in tutorials was contradicted in subsequent feedback sessions. For example, Lesley was advised to reduce the number of illustrations in her work, but was then criticized in the final feedback for not including enough. Emma and Lesley gave numerous examples of inconsistent feedback and ambiguities in direction during the course of the interview. They spoke at length about what had gone wrong, citing how little input they had received, and felt that they had not received value for money:

E   I know they're...they've got things to do but they're...most
          of the time they're just popping around...

L   ...it's their job...

E   ...yeah that's what they're paid for...that's what WE pay
          for...we pay to get something out of it.

This comment has become even more pertinent in view of the forthcoming rise in university fees, and it will be interesting to see if a re-distribution of power will occur as a result of economic, rather than social, pressures. Emma and Lesley were contemptuous of the feedback they had received and the impersonal manner in which they had been informed of their grade: the mark was given online and the scant written feedback posted in their pigeonholes a month later with an advice note via a text message. Perhaps most disturbing was the damage to their confidence and the reservations they had both been left with about progressing to an MA course, which was their intention. Emma described herself as feeling 'deflated' and the transcript continues:

E   I was really excited, because I thought finally a piece of
         written work, coz I quite enjoyed it…but…

R   Hmm

E   …then it was just…

L   I didn't want to know my grade…

E   No…

Despite the fact that they had both said they had learned nothing from
the feedback and still would have no idea how they might improve their
dissertation if they re-worked it, Lesley, like Jane, had no desire for further
discussion with the tutor, though Emma felt that it might be useful.

Jane contrasted her National Diploma experience with that on the
degree, and blamed the diminished tutor contact time for not having
the same positive relationships with staff on the degree course. She felt
misunderstood by tutors, who misinterpreted her ebullient façade and
informal way of discussing her work as 'cocky' and flippant. When Jane had
experienced some personal problems, which had affected her performance
and progress on the course, she was not able to discuss this with academic
staff or peers. As a result, she appeared to have isolated herself by working
mostly from home, although she blamed this on lack of cohesion within
her year group. She described how, as the demands of the course had
increased, the social interaction between students had decreased and that
this was compounded through a lack of communication with tutors.

In later interviews, she described her relationship with her dissertation tutor as
'turbulent', although she obviously admired her and had seen her on a number

of occasions. She told me that she was a 'task master', but had helped to organise her work, and she had managed to progress to the point where she was almost ready to submit without much input from her dyslexia advisor. When she discussed the subject, she was interesting, informed, animated and involved in the work, but she said that the way she was required to write was prohibitive in allowing her to bring her identity to the work, something her tutor had suggested would enhance her grade. I am reminded of the importance that Greenbank and Penketh (2009:468) place on the supervisory relationships in their research 'the relationship between student and tutor is perhaps the most significant theme discussed in interviews'.

In our last interview, when she had graduated, Jane told me that following our previous interview the difficulties with her tutor had escalated, until she had asked her Head of Year to intervene. The main issue was that her tutor had been highly critical of her work, but failed to convey how the situation might be rectified. Following her complaint, her tutor had apologized and was more helpful. I reminded her that she had wanted to bring more of her self into her writing, and she responded by saying that she had had to compromise to some extent. She explained that she had tried to write her dissertation 'as a scholar', but had found this unmanageable as she was unable to even remember what some of the words she had used meant past the writing, so she had written, not as she would speak, but using vocabulary she would not normally use. When we spoke about feedback, she said it had been brief and unhelpful and that she 'really needed a one-to-one'. When I asked her if that was a possibility, she implied that it might

be initiated, but she 'really didn't feel like throwing [her] weight around now'. To request more feedback did not seem to me to be unreasonable but she obviously felt that she would be viewed as petulant by such an action.

These examples from the data reflect the concerns that Wood (2000) expresses over the lack of space for the identities of writers and readers in academic discourse, and the tensions between student writers and their assessors. It highlights the need to address the points Lillis (2001) makes in the re-thinking of academic writing, especially: ambiguities in assignment specifications and feedback; exclusion of identities where they fail to conform to accepted academic norms; and emphasis on collaborative talk between student-writers and tutors to facilitate negotiation of what is acceptable; in order to move towards a model where tutors and students share the same language.

The removal or compromising of identity is fairly central when considering if academic writing is non-inclusive and this is compounded when there is no discourse through which this can be re-negotiated and when communication between students and tutors is ineffective. In the students' experience of academic writing Hannah clearly felt bullied and marginalized; Emma and Lesley were mystified, intimidated, isolated and angry; Pink Jim lacked confidence; Jane was frustrated by knowing she had the intelligence to demonstrate her subject knowledge, make contextual links and critical judgements but the severity of her dyslexia prohibited her from communicating this in academic language; Tombola refused to compromise, avoided communication with tutors and just failed to achieve a first class honours because of his deficiencies in academic writing (not even specified

as a requirement in the subject benchmark statement) despite a very strong creative practice; and Roger believed he had to change his persona in order to be considered an academic. Roger did cite an example where his academic work had helped to strengthen his studio practice though. Earnel stands out as the only one of my co-researchers who is comfortable with her identity as an academic writer and feels confident enough to work with and benefit from her academic writing practice in art and design. Teel, as a white Finnish student, stands apart from all the history that comes from the UK education system and its historical and social prejudices. She does not make judgements about UK education based on anything but her limited experience of it. Equally perhaps, tutors may not pre-judge Teel by the same social criteria as her UK counterparts, as it is not as possible to place her, as Finnish student, within a particular social stereotype recognized in the UK. In that sense her identity is less under threat, and there is more scope for that to be explored and respected. Her position as a Finn places her as the authority on her identity.

Does academic writing enable art and design students to link theory and practice?

Earlier in this chapter I questioned the effectiveness of academic writing as a vehicle for student engagement with the historical, theoretical and contextual aspects of art and design. My data suggested that it is effective only when a students have been taught the conventions, and have a social and educational background that enables them to both make sense of, and identify with the discourse, as seemed to be the case with Earnel.

Lillis (2001) asserts that this, the dominant literacy practice within formal schooling and higher education, requires participants to have cultural and linguistic capital, marginalizing non-traditional students. There was little evidence to suggest that academic writing had made a positive contribution to the educational experience of my small sample of co-researchers. Nor was there evidence that engaging in the conventions of academic writing had significantly enhanced their understanding of their own creative position in the context of the history of art, contemporary practice or art theory.

Apart from Earnel, it was only Teel whose engagement with academic writing seemed to help her to place her practice within the broader context in art and design and enhance her critical engagement with theory. Teel was an exception, not only as an overseas student for whom English is a second language, but also because she was studying on a different course, where the approaches to writing seemed to be rather different. Co-researchers who were studying on the Fine Art degree were required to adhere more strictly to formal conventions such as the use of the third person referent. They also reported that written assignments were not always easily aligned to their studio practice, and there was little interaction between studio teaching staff and staff who taught contextual studies. By contrast, most of Teel's tutors worked with her in the studio as well as overseeing her written assignments. As seen in the example on page 145-147, her assignments allowed a far greater element of personal engagement as well as creative interpretation and conceptual thinking, in addition to requiring research skills and intellectual reasoning, as compared to more traditional essay questions.

Lillis (2001) proposes re-thinking academic writing from a broad perspective across disciplines, and the theoretical position she adopts centres on the social dimensions of literacy and language and issues around power and equity. Her critique and arguments for change are applicable to traditional academic writing in art and design, as emerges from the data, but there are additional dimensions peculiar to art and design. These centre specifically on tensions between the fundamental features of art and design practice and inconsistencies with the process and aims of academic writing.

Concerns around writing in art and design, prompted Edwards (2005:2), to define the *WritingPAD* project as aiming

> to inform the cultures of learning in studio-based art and design practice and to encourage the use of writing as a valid tool for the reflective practitioner.

WritingPAD aimed to encourage students to critically reflect on their studio practice through writing which, in turn, would contribute towards their literacy skills in demonstrating their theoretical and contextual knowledge. In doing so, spaces would also be opened up for re-framing and re-defining academic writing in art and design, which would align it more closely to practice ideologically. Instead of students perceiving writing to be an unwelcome add-on with little relevance to their arts practice, it would become an integral part of practice. Candlin (2001) highlights the re-thinking of the boundaries of art and art history in the seventies in acknowledgement of the stronger relationship art education developed with intellectual, social and cultural issues in the wake of art movements

including feminist and conceptual art practice. Art education moved away from 'sensibility-plus-dates' (Candlin 2001:6), which might be appropriately accommodated in traditional academic writing, to an 'understanding of art as a social, material and expressive practice.'

The aim of educating artists, as opposed to artisans, placed the identity of the artist at the centre of their practice. Raein (2003) asserts that this is in opposition to the removal of writer identity, which characterizes traditional academic writing. This was adopted to conform to the regulatory requirements of degrees, without due consideration to its compatibility with the discipline, nor how the discipline has developed over time. Hannah found that as soon as her identity as an artist began to be interwoven in the subject of her writing that academic writing was incompatible. This was not only due to the conception of academic writing as rule-laden and inflexible (Wood 2000), but centred on the constraints imposed by her tutor/assessor/ reader. Wood (2000) and in a more abstract way, Eisner (2004) propose that a model for writing, based on the model for designing which is expected 'to conform to and simultaneously challenge conventions and constraints' Orr & Blythman (2004:3) is more aligned to creative practice with which art students are more familiar. Both outputs are qualitatively judged but this aspect of assessment is possibly more transparent in the assessment of arts practice. What is significantly different in the experiences of my co-researchers is that, in arts practice, the space is made for negotiation and discussion through numerous informal conversations and studio critiques. The work takes place in a social context, with peers and tutors

contributing to the process of its development, as opposed to the isolating

experience of writing. All of my co-researchers found writing to be an

isolating experience, contrasting, in most cases, to the studio environment

where it was common practice to work in small communities, sharing ideas.

Hannah describes sharing written work with others as akin to 'showing your

knickers'. Emma and Lesley, despite appearing to be inseparable in almost

every other area of their lives, had not seen each others' written work,

and had only discussed it in the interview with me. Roger and Teel would

only allow me to read their work once it had been 'legitimized' through the

marking system. Even Earnel, who was relatively confident, told me she did

not share her written work with others, although the primary reason for this

seemed to be the fear that her ideas would be stolen. This again highlights

the cultural difference in the process, as she worked within a community of

practice (Wenger 1998) in the studio. The issue of the ownership of work

and legitimacy of influence from other artists is not only less problematic

but, as Ivanič (1998) asserts, the identity of the artist and her influences

are central to fine art practice. She and Pink Jim both highlighted the

reluctance to talk to peers about their written work while it was in progress,

and only feeling able to make any reference to it at all after it was handed

in. The experiences of my co-researchers mirror the experiences of

students in Mayfield's (2005) study. Orr & Blythman (2004) suggest that a

collaborative model for writing paralleled to studio practice would create

the conditions for learning in writing to become a social practice as

advocated by Lillis (2001).

Mayfield also urges a development of writing practices more closely aligned to studio work, and proposes the acceptance of multi-modality. Redefining the role of writing in art and design education taking account of both broader issues of equity, and appropriateness to the discipline, is one approach. For some of my co-researchers, this would address many of the issues they have raised through their interactions with me. However co-researchers like Jane would find it difficult to realise her full potential for achievement through the written word, even if all other conditions were right. Lockheart (2003) urges a re-examination of course objectives to inform assessment, and to prioritize the best methods of assessment for the student, rather than relying on those traditionally accepted. Within art and design education in the UK, some institutions are offering different modes of assessment to the traditional dissertation. The next section reports and comments on a strand of my research that examined five such alternative approaches, drawing where possible on the experiences of the tutors who have developed them and students who have taken part in order to try to determine if they are more appropriate complements to students' arts practice.

As I stated at the beginning of the chapter, there are many overlaps in addressing my research questions, and I have inevitably already touched upon aspects of the compatibility of academic writing with art and design practice as a form of communication in the previous sections of this chapter. However, Hannah's conflict with her tutor over the content of her dissertation extended into her studio practice, as this extract from an email she sent me shows (reproduced with her permission):

> Not surprisingly, I am having the same problem in my studio
> work. I have been told that if I don't change my work there too, I
> am going to fail or get a low mark in my final year. If I am clever,
> I might be able to find a way around that in paint which will be
> much harder in black and white text, which is much more literal.

This introduces a whole new dimension to the argument, where attention

centres on the power relations between students and tutors as being the

primary constraint, rather than restrictions imposed by particular forms of

communication. Greenbank and Penketh (2009) focus on the chosen topic

for a dissertation, rather than the way the piece is written, as constraining

student autonomy. In art and design, where the artists' identity is widely

accepted as hugely significant in the production of work, this can hardly

be viewed as preparing students for professional, creative practice, a

requirement identified in the subject benchmark statement (QAAHE 2002).

My research focus in questioning academic writing as being the most

appropriate complement to art students' practice exposes some

constraining aspects of the language, but more concerning are impositions

on student autonomy arising from the lack of negotiating space in teaching

and learning, which, as Hannah has found, can and does extend to

students' arts practice. The difference is that, as she suggests in the extract

of her email, she considers she is better equipped to covertly resist through

the medium of art and design than she is through academic writing.

Conclusion

In this chapter I introduced my co-researchers, including information

about their prior educational experience and previous employment where

applicable. I addressed each of my initial three questions with reference to

the data presenting them in separate sections. The first question, examining

the function of academic writing, finds that co-researchers' views and

experience vary. The view that it is a grudgingly accepted 'means to an

end' associated with undertaking a degree course is almost universally

expressed with little perceived value in the context of their arts practice.

Roger also feels that it is his passport to recognition as an 'academic', and

something to which he aspires, but along with other participants, resents its

impingement on his studio time. Earnel understands its potential to enhance

her practice, but offers no examples of it having done so. Roger is able to

see how it has, occasionally, impacted positively on his studio practice. Only

Teel provides evidence of the conceptual intellectual links she has made to

arts practice through her engagement with academic writing.

In the second section I looked for evidence of how the background of

the student impacts on their ability to engage in academic writing. This

is by far the most complex and multi-faceted question to address and

issues arising have huge areas of overlap. Key themes highlight: the

lack of taught expertise that students bring to HE which privileges those

most familiar with academic writing; the avoidance of support when

perceived as a deficit model; ambiguities in the criteria for assessment and

inconsistency in feedback; inaccessibility of language used in seminars

and by tutors; inability to locate students' own identity within the academic

environment; conflicts with tutors mostly around relationships of power

on the compliance/resistance continuum; and, isolation. There are fewer

illustrations from the data to address the third question, which looks at

the compatibility of academic writing with arts practice, although many

of the examples upon which I have drawn in the two previous sections

also pose challenges to its compatibility through key issues which run

through the whole study, such as power, language and identity. In the

final chapter (Chapter Seven), I draw upon my interpretation of the data

to provide a critical commentary upon current practice in the context

of my own study, and how that links to existing work in the field, and

to make recommendations for the future in art and design, but also the

implications across broader subject areas. I reflect upon the impact my

research has had on my own teaching practice and anticipate the direction

of my research in the future. Prior to that, Chapter Six is devoted to a new

dataset (see Appendix 8, page 252) that emerged from the research, which

examines existing alternative modes of assessment to the formal academic

dissertation available in five institutions across the UK, one of which is my

home institution.

Chapter Six

Researching alternative options

to the formal academic dissertation

As my study progressed, data from the work with my co-researchers began to suggest that unless academic writing is, as Lillis (2001) suggests, 'reframed' (see page 33), it currently is failing to meet the needs of students or to be effective in delivering the objectives of the subject benchmark statement for art and design. In addition, literature I had studied pointed me towards examples of alternative modes of assessment that had already been developed across the UK. I was interested to find out how these compared with traditional academic writing in providing a more meaningful link between history, theory, context and practice for art and design students, and models which also took a greater account of diversity. I would have felt my study to be incomplete had I not at least presented a critical appraisal drawing on insights from tutors and students who have been involved, either through the development of, or engagement with, alternative models. I acknowledge the limitations of this analysis within the timeframe for this research, but future work would plan to undertake a more thorough investigation in the light of findings. My focus on both tutors and students in this strand of the research reflects my interpretation of the need for both parties to be committed to change for successful implementation.

In this chapter I present findings related to my fourth research question:

4. Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing?

It may be helpful to refer to the data in Appendix 8 (p252). The names of all institutions, staff and students are anonymised using the acronym ADI (Art and Design Institution), followed by a number or referent.

Art and Design Institution One (ADI1)

The model offered within ADI1, the viva voce, is currently an option for dyslexic students only. I was able to conduct a telephone interview with the member of staff who developed the model to whom I will refer as ADI1 Tutor. Her work is underpinned by some years of educational research into the nature of dyslexia and how this condition impacts on students in art and design education. It centres around the design of an effective curriculum for dyslexic students. With reference to the extract from one of my interviews with Jane (see pp 153-154), I can imagine that she would view this option as a more effective way of demonstrating her knowledge and understanding. The recent work of ADI1 Tutor argues for the adoption of the viva voce model for all students, moving it from an accommodation model into the mainstream. This reflects the challenge to the dominance of the written word, articulated by Marks (2004), and Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). It is in recognition of the increasing role of visual culture in today's society, and the increasingly use of visual material in education, but this also places some emphasis on the potential of oral alternatives. ADI1 Tutor views the greatest obstacle to this as being the reluctance of teaching staff to change their practice to enable this. She shared her staff guide to the viva with me, a comprehensive description of the requirements, support and assessment processes which I shall summarize below with illuminations from our conversations.

The viva consists of an oral presentation for thirty minutes delivered to the

supervisor, internal verifier and dyslexia specialist tutor, followed by a further

thirty-minute examination of the content the student has delivered. The

standard of work is graded for their final award using a rubric of assessment

for oral delivery and using the learning outcomes of the degree programme.

The viva must include formal references, a guide to the contents of their

work and a short portfolio of categorized evidence reflecting the process

and content of their delivery. Students are invited to use audio-visual

material to present and further support their work. The viva is recorded as

evidence of the discourse and defence of their arguments as presented for

final dissertation and externally examined. Students are counselled before

deciding on the viva and receive relevant support in the development of

oral skills and use of appropriate documentation techniques. Students are

entitled to a viva rehearsal and appropriate feedback.

ADI1 Tutor told me that few students opt for the viva voce option, but

those who have chosen this option have produced excellent results. She

introduced me to the work of ADI1 Student (ADI1S), who had been one

of the first students to present a viva voce option as an alternative to the

dissertation, and whose work, in the form of a full recording of his viva, I

was able to download from the ADI1 website. ADI1S was studying for a BA

Honours in Sound Arts, a highly suitable subject for an audio presentation

and therefore a good choice for an exemplar to advocate a particular

model of assessment. It is difficult to make a sound judgement as to its

effectiveness in respect of the learning outcomes and criteria for assessment

without the subject specialist knowledge or access to the full portfolio, but ADI1 Tutor assured me that external examiners were satisfied that there was parity in the evidence presented. The thirty-minute question and answer session following the presentation offered more opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge, and correct any ambiguities in their work, than a dissertation. I would consider that to be a positive aspect, as they would not be able to do so if they did not have a good understanding of the subject. Of more concern were the opportunities that examining tutors have to 'lead' the students towards appropriate responses, which might preclude students' own personal tutors from heading up the assessment process.

Art and Design Institution Two (ADI2)

2009 saw the first group of students to opt for an alternative to the traditional final year dissertation this year when ADI2 introduced the 'live trading module' to decorative arts students, who revamped an empty shop unit in the city as part of the process, from which they ran their own business. The course leader described the module as a direct response to the large number of decorative arts students who go on to launch their own businesses after graduation, and aims to introduce students to some of the real opportunities and challenges that they will face in industry. This would seem to be in line with the subject benchmark statement (see page 141). ADI2 appears to be the driving force behind the introduction of the module, and has a strong background in business. He described the features that need to be evidenced individually for assessment: a 2,500 word proposal plus a research folder; presentation to a panel in the form

of a ten-minute summary which might include a Powerpoint; a business

plan and a weblog documenting the process. Contextual studies tutors are

part of the assessment process to ensure that there is parity between the

Live Trading Module and the Dissertation options. The course leader drew

parallels between the research process for a dissertation and the research

process in developing a business plan, but having been involved in both, I

did not find the analogy particularly convincing in terms of the requirements

to engage with theory in the development of a dissertation, while a business

is vocationally and market-based. ADI2 is highly dependent on developing

relationships with the local business community to facilitate the opening of

premises in the High Street, through sponsorship, and the course leader

explained that trading could only be licensed for six weeks and one day or

they would be liable to prohibitive business rates. He was only able to offer

anecdotal evidence when we discussed whether there was a tendency for

particular students to opt for the Live Trading Module. He described the

typical student to be attracted to this option as being less 'bookish' and

being 'active types'. He had not noticed, or looked for, any trend for dyslexic

students to be more attracted to the module.

On the BA Decorative Arts course, students must accrue 120 credits by

selecting from the following options:

- Creative Practice – negotiated project option A – 100 credits

- Creative Practice – negotiated project option B – 80 credits

- Dissertation – Option A – 20 credits

- Dissertation – Option B – 40 credits

- Live Trading – Option C – 40 credits

Students wishing to take the Live Trading Module must therefore opt

for the 80 credit negotiated project. In the first year the option was

offered, although course leader was unable to let me have the statistics,

approximately a quarter of the Level Three group opted for the Live

Trading Module, which rose to approximately one third in 2010. Although

statistics were not available, he reported that grades achieved were

broadly similar to students opting for a traditional route. He describes the

module as 'challenging', and whilst acknowledging that many students

value the academic option offered by the dissertation, his rationale for the

introduction of the module focuses on the opportunities it gives students

to develop essential business skills and to offer a wider choice of options.

> This will give them the essential practical experience they need
> to achieve that [*establishing their own business*], allowing them
> to manage their marketing, accounts and pricing, investigate
> sources and suppliers, and generate interest from their
> prospective customer base. (Telephone interview 05/07/10)

I attempted to contact three students who had undertaken the Live Trading

Module as an alternative option to a traditional dissertation, but received no

response. I would have liked to have more information about their research

process as well as establishing how closely this project links to their Creative

Practice option. Quotes from students who had undertaken the Live Trading

Module as reported in the institution's press releases included:

"This was the perfect option for me because as soon as I graduate I'm going to be running my own business – the studio is in the process of being built now. As a designer I'm already doing the practical work alongside my studies, so the live trading module really complements that. It makes perfect sense."

<div align="right">Student A (male)</div>

"I'm considering setting up my own business and I thought this route was more practical for me personally. The dissertation is great as an academic exercise but I felt this would be more useful once I go out into the real world and need to have an idea of how to run a successful business."

<div align="right">Student B (female)</div>

Art and Design Institution Three (ADI3)

ADI3 is my home institution, and engaging both staff and students in my research was less problematic than external organizations. The offer of the project option is not standard practice across the whole institution, which seems to mirror practice in other universities, where key champions develop and pilot alternative models, and are often considered to be maverick, encountering opposition from policy makers within the workplace. Two of the degree courses delivered on my own campus offer the project option. I was able to interview both the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Architecture (ADI3 Dean) as well as gain insights from the Course Leader of the BA in Interior Architecture (ADI3 Tutor). I also interviewed two students who had recently completed the project option, one from each of the two courses.

ADI3 Student A (ADI3SA) has recently graduated from Part 1 of the RIBA accredited qualification in architecture, the equivalent of a bachelors degree.

He undertook the project option and gained a first with the highest mark for the unit in his year group. When I asked him why he chose to do the project he explained that his lowest marks on the course had been on his essays, which he attributed to being 'mildly dyslexic'. He was animated when he described his project work, which he had based around music, his other passion, exploring the science of sound in relation to architecture. He told me there was a considerable amount of research involved, but that this was not what he would describe as 'text book research' but practice-based 'exploration, and sort of...building up to that final...sort of ...installation'. His descriptions of the project implied considerable engagement with theoretical and conceptual elements of architectural practice. The project involved acquiring technical skills and working with external partners. As part of the work he negotiated access to a professional orchestral rehearsals, recording them as part of his installation within the school of architecture. Ideas from the work influenced his studio-based final major project, as well as helping to secure him a position for his compulsory sabbatical year before he moves onto Part 2 of the course. He felt he had really gained from doing the project and that he had not lost anything in not producing a traditional dissertation. His submission included formal presentations including animations, a two thousand-word project report, a notebook that he had kept from start to finish, CDs of recordings, prototypes, a photographic documentation of all his experiments as well as his installation. He felt that the project was much more personal than a dissertation could have been. My interview with him seemed to resonate with the six distinctive forms of thinking which Eisner (2004:10)

identifies as being relevant to everything we do, the development of which will

'frame imaginative solutions to the problems we face.' (see page 21)

When I interviewed ADI3 Dean, who is ADI3SA's overall course director, he

told me that the project option was introduced three years ago, but in the

first year nobody opted to do it. He told me that some students have started

to engage with a project and switched to a dissertation when they realise

how demanding the project option is. He emphasized the need to include a

piece of extended writing in response to the industry demand for them to be

able to produce reports, which is a requirement of the project, but admitted

that it tended to be the weakest area and he intends to introduce extra

guidance for the students. He observed that this is the place where assessors

look for the elements of research, a hypothesis, enquiry, identification of the

literature, in order to be comparable to the dissertation. He does not feel that

it is more time-consuming to supervise and assess, although the distribution

of assessment time is different, being more continuous. He explained that

all the studio staff within the school supervise the unit, and make a 'pitch' to

the students when it is introduced, highlighting their expertise and the areas

they will be able to support. This practice aligned more closely to Mayfield's

(2005) call for a more open approach from tutors, in which they are prepared

to share their own practice and experience with students. Some tutors state

overtly that they want to supervise a project, or that they specifically want their

students to undertake a dissertation, but the staffing structure encourages

an integrated approach to theory and practice. ADI3 Dean told me that there

is no individual student feedback for units, but that he would be happy to

Grade band	Achievement by dissertation (number of students)	Achievement by project (number of students)
First	0	2
Upper Second	12	2
Lower Second	10	3
Third	0	0
Not passed	2	0

Figure 5.1: On BA Architecture, out of a cohort of 31 students, seven chose the project option (23%).

Grade band	Achievement by dissertation (number of students)	Achievement by project (number of students)
First	0	0
Upper Second	3	1
Lower Second	6	0
Third	0	0
Not passed	2	0

Figure 5.2: On BA Interior Art and Design, out of a cohort of 12 students, one chose the project option (9%).

support me should I wish to design a model to take my work forward. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 present the statistics of participation and achievement.

I also interviewed the one student ADI3 Student B (ADI3SB) from the Interior Architecture course, who opted to do the project last academic year. She began by telling me that she is also dyslexic, and although her writing skills are reasonably good, she finds reading very difficult. She welcomed the opportunity that the project offers to put theory into practice. She based her project around voids and hidden spaces in the city where she is a student, drawing on the influence of Guy Dabord's work in Paris and others, working

towards the production of a large interactive structure which she described

as a three dimensional mapping structure which captured her findings

around the city. There was a significant research element to the project and

ADI3SB experienced the benefit of this in her presentations, where she was

able to articulate her ideas and methodology and to back it up effectively in

the question and answer section, in a similar way to the student who took

the viva voce option (see pp 178-180). There was a requirement to work

through and document the problem, which consolidated and contextualised

her learning. She felt that it was a springboard for other ideas and further

development and continues to feed into her practice. She found it interesting

and inspiring, contrasting with the painful and unrewarding experiences

documented with regard to the dissertation, although the contribution course

teaching has to this needs further investigation. She took me through the

development of other essays, all based around a strong technical exploration

of structure, and her understanding was obviously very sophisticated, enabling

her to maximize her ability to draw upon that kinaesthetic learning to produce

a colourful piece of writing. She told me she did not consider dyslexia to be

a disadvantage, but she focuses on her strengths in solving her problems

with reading and writing. She also felt that she had benefited through the

development of technical skills, and her project had been more of a holistic

learning experience mirroring the way she saw her practice developing, and

had a strong personal element. Her tutor told me that he feels that the project

option places the work within the discipline, and counters the fact that many

students have a far greater ability than is reflected in their writing.

Art and Design Institution Four (ADI4)

In a telephone interview with the Historical and Contextual Studies tutor,

to whom I will refer as ADI4 Tutor, I posed the questions I had devised as a

framework and her responses to these, and an examination of the course

handbook which she forwarded to me, contributed towards this overview

of the project model at her institution. The project as an alternative option

to the dissertation has been offered to students at ADI4 for about six years.

An agreement is drawn up between the student and their tutor three months

before hand-in. ADI4 Tutor gave an example of a typical submission:

> Joe Bloggs is planning to run a workshop on the use of natural
>
> materials in art. As part of this process he is planning to submit:
>
> - A photographic record of the workshop
> - An exhibition of work produced in the workshop
> - A 2000-2500 word rationale and plan with bibliography
> - An organised research portfolio

ADI4 Tutor described another example of a young film maker who was

examining the differences between domestic and public arenas. She

initiated workshops which debated the issues which she filmed and she

also interviewed people queuing to view the Takahashi exhibition to find

out what they hoped to get out of it. ADI4 Tutor explained the nature of

the development of work up until the submission of the dissertation or

alternative project. There is a growing VLE with comprehensive study skills

support which goes some way to addressing equity issues. In the first year

students do a long thin history and theory contextual studies module specific

to the discipline studied. A long thin module occupies only a fraction of the

timetable each week, one day a week for example, but is timetabled for a

number of weeks. The ten-week course culminates in the submission of a

1500-2000 word essay. In the second part of the first year, students have

cross disciplinary seminar groups covering a whistle stop view of Marxism,

Post-colonialism and Postmodernism. Tutors have twenty-four students

in their group and they work together in six groups of four students on a

ten-minute group presentation, with what ADI4 Tutor describes as some

fairly outrageous outcomes, which is intended to bounce off the taught

course. The whole group are assessed in one day, and tutors use peer

group assessment as well as their own, which encourages dialogue and the

negotiation of meaning. In their second year, students choose options from

a bundled course reflecting staff interests. There is considerable input from

the historical and contextual studies staff and the students have a strong

academic grounding prior to producing the dissertation or engaging with

the project. ADI4 Tutor told me that only two or three students a year out

of a group of 100-200 students opt to do the project, and she emphasized

that it is not regarded as a 'soft option', being possibly more difficult than

a traditional dissertation in some ways. She felt that many students still

opt for the traditional dissertation because they think it would be taken

more seriously by employers, and they feel they need to have evidence of

academic ability in a more traditional and 'accepted' format. Some students

even go for the double weighted option of 12-16,000 words.

In assessing the project tutors have to focus on assessment criteria

identical to the dissertation, and ensure that the evidence is there whatever

the format. ADI4 Tutor did not see this as a problem within her staff team, and there has been no resistance from staff to the introduction of the project option. She explained that staff assessing are normally part-time and are paid very little for assessing written work, so activity which requires attendance in order to assess, such as presentations, lectures, exhibitions and workshops, which are paid at a more attractive rate, are beneficial to staff. She also commented that intellectual engagement with students through those kind of activities 'keeps us on our toes' and that the students have produced some fascinating work for their project outcomes. This notion of the tutor as needing to be continually reflective of their own practice, and the implication that a space exists where they can be challenged and held to account by students, resonates with Freire (1972), Ruddock and Fielding (2006), Lioy (2003) and others.

Tutor ADI4 feels that one of the key benefits of the project option is that some students find a traditional dissertation too daunting and this gives them an alternative platform upon which to evidence intellectual engagement with their subject, and to demonstrate that they are capable of meeting the criteria for assessment in a mode of delivery which is a more attractive option. It does not appear that ADI4 have engaged in any documentation to capture either the students' views or examined results as a comparator. Few students opt for the alternative submission and anecdotally the achievement tends to be marginally above average. ADI4 Tutor reported that students tend to be pleased to have the flexibility and respond by producing more work, and have the additional motivation of wishing to prove that the project is as valuable

as the dissertation. She attempted to put me in touch with students who

had undertaken the option by forwarding my details by email with a brief

explanation, but none of them contacted me.

Art and Design Institution FIVE (ADI5)

ADI5 has a radical approach, compared to other institutions, having a

'Blended Learning' approach to art theory and practice throughout the

degree course, so a number of my prepared questions (see Appendix

16, p262) were not appropriate. The Visual and Cultural Studies Blended

Learning Strategy produced by the institution sets out the accepted modes

of assessment, and the Head of the Centre for Visual and Cultural Studies,

to whom I will refer hereafter as ADI5 Tutor, gave the following explanation of

how this works in practice (edited from our email communication):

> We don't have dissertations. All students do a Research Project.
> They negotiate with us what this will be, what form it will take,
> how they will document it and present their findings. They have to
> prove to us that they will be able to meet the learning outcomes.
> They always write something (even if it's just a script to act out),
> but they have to show that the form of the writing is appropriate
> to what they plan to research (just as, for example, they would
> have to substantiate their reasons for making a painting rather
> than a video...). Lots of students do something that is more
> practice-led, but a majority (in some cases imagining they are
> being risk adverse) still place most of the emphasis on the written
> component since this is their main opportunity to write. Most
> would choose to write in an academic manner, but we often
> get other kinds of discourse, sometimes fiction or audio/video
> presentations. The learning outcomes we use are for the module
> as a whole (20 credits across the final year). There are three

outcomes that the students have to meet, broadly: research, analysis and communication. Everything is assessed in relation to these learning outcomes so all the work submitted achieves parity. Students can only proceed on the basis that they will, at least, be able to meet the outcomes with their proposed research. We use our academic judgement to decide these matters. This means we have to consider what students are trying to achieve, talk to them and give them very clear feedback.

He also explained that the blending learning approach is adopted in the three years preceding this, and the 'straightforward essay approach', which is typical of many institutions, doesn't exist at ADI5. Alternatives might be a wiki, a live project or a group project as well as written outcomes, but this is dependent on the course and what is relevant to it. He explained why:

> There aren't any 'alternative' models, just negotiated learning. The dissertation is not normative, many university undergraduate programmes in the humanities don't have them at all. It's an unfounded assumption in art and design that it should be what a final year student does. Students have to be able to identify what they want to engage with (as they might with a dissertation). Art students are engaged with a practice: they don't just reflect upon culture, they make it. So they need to show how they engage with their research. Essentially, they need to demonstrate a praxis. The benefits of this are that it helps them how to think as artists and to pursue a practice. A dissertation can also facilitate this but it doesn't make this a mandatory requirement. So it's essential that the assessment brief make this clear - that's the difference.

He went on the explain that there will be a review of this for the session beginning in September 2010, and the new departmental structures will enable him to break down the final barriers to working with staff in each school:

As a Head of the new School of Art, it's my intention that the theory elements will lead projects that students engage with. There will be no overt division between theory and practice, rather, we will insist on a praxis-based approach across all modules and related electives.

ADI5 Tutor has offered to put me in touch with students who have graduated within this system of blended learning, but many of the questions I had devised for students centre around their decision to opt for an alternative mode of assessment to the dissertation, which is not a key issue for students in this context, as there is no clear distinction made between options. I included long quotes from the data in this section as it seemed to encapsulate so many aspects covered in the literature review.

There are distinct parallels to be drawn between Eisner's (2004:4) six distinctive forms of thinking (see page 27-28); the aspirations ADI5 tutor highlights as those desirable to enable his students to develop as professional artists; and the learning outcomes identified by the QAA subject benchmark statement (2008:3) in defining the principals of learning in art and design at undergraduate level as:

- the capacity to be creative
- an aesthetic sensibility
- intellectual enquiry
- skills in team working
- an appreciation of diversity
- the ability to conduct research in a variety of modes
- the quality of reflecting on one's own learning and development
- the capacity to work independently, determining one's own future learning needs.

Eisner advocates drawing upon those modes of thinking, which characterise the development of artists, across a wider range of subject areas, arguing that they are 'relevant to virtually all aspects of what we do' (2004:4). ADI5 tutor does not exclude the dissertation as being one option where students might be able to demonstrate these abilities, but asserts that it is just one method through which this might be achieved, and that the decision regarding the format of the assessed work should be taken through a process of negotiation between the tutor and student. This fits more comfortably with the Subject Benchmark Statement for Art and Design (QAA 2008) than a stated requirement that a student must produce a formal dissertation.

Wood (1998:45) describes 'crafts-guilds result-orientated knowledge as 'task-based knowledge that facilitates situated actions and judgments.' The reference to 'situated actions and judgements' require the learner to not only be aware of current trends in their discipline and across the sector, and the historical positioning as to how this has come about. The acquisition of this knowledge undoubtedly draws upon what Wood refers to as 'monastic truth-orientated knowledge' or 'text-based knowledge that serves to validify and fortify belief', but has to go much further than an assimilation and regurgitation of that knowledge presented in the text. This is captured within the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Art and Design (2008:8) under the criteria for critical engagement, which includes the ability to:

- analyze information and experiences, formulate independent judgments, and articulate reasoned arguments through reflection, review and evaluation

- source and research relevant material, assimilating and articulating relevant findings

- formulate reasoned responses to the critical judgments of others

- identify personal strengths and needs, and reflect on personal development.

It should be noted that, within that statement, there is no requirement for those competencies to be either acquired, or articulated within a specified format, acknowledging that:

> Institutions employ a range of ways to impart historical, theoretical and critical dimensions of their disciplines and to make such dimensions integral to and manifest in student work.

> (QAA 2008:5)

It acknowledges that students:

> ...also develop verbal and written communication skills as a result of interaction with their peers and tutors, both formally and informally. They use a variety of written forms to articulate and synthesize their knowledge and understanding.

It further asserts that they 'articulate and synthesize their knowledge and understanding, attributes and skills in effective ways in the contexts of creative practice, employment, further study, research and self-fulfillment.' (QAA 2008:7) The model of negotiated learning, described by ADI5 tutor, where students are required to both identify, clarify and justify their proposals, seems to me to encourage higher levels of personal and professional engagement with their subject and offers an appropriate model for students to situate their own identity as an artist within historical and contemporary contexts.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented data which provides some insights into alternative models of assessment to the dissertation. This merely offers a snapshot to capture what might be possible and how these alternatives might be compared to assessment models based on the current traditional role of academic writing in an art and design context, rather than a comprehensive critique. Options range from what I perceive to be: a model of accommodation designed in response to the high incidence of dyslexia amongst students in art and design (ADI1); an option which takes greater account of the need to develop employability skills (ADI2); a project model which focuses on taking a greater account of students' relationship of theory to arts practice (ADI3); negotiated learning aiming to achieve a balance between vocational and academic course requirements (ADI4) and a model which focuses exclusively on the relationship between theory and practice with little reference to academic writing as having been part of its history (ADI5), which may be attributed to its physical location outside England and the influence of historical differences in legislation surrounding education. However the most recently published revision of the Subject Benchmark Statement for Art and Design in 2008 was prepared by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in consultation with the Scottish Government and has been adopted as the definitive document across the United Kingdom.

In the final chapter, I reflect on what I have learned from this research, and how this might contribute towards a rethinking of current practice. Is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art students' practice? If not, why isn't it? And what could be more appropriate?

Chapter Seven

The end and new beginnings

I return to the title of my thesis to begin my final chapter in the light of my investigation: Is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art students' practice? I have divided my commentary to address the three research original research questions, and the fourth question which emerged during the research, in the context of the four key issues; the historical adoption of academic writing into art and design education; the conception of academic writing as non-inclusive; the integration of history/theory and studio practice; and the influence of technological advances impacting on cultural practices and challenging the dominance of the written word. There is considerable crossover between the research questions, but I have attempted to keep my commentary within those areas for clarity where possible.

What is the function of academic writing in a higher education art and design context?

This question is first addressed in considering the historical backdrop against which academic writing was first introduced into the art and design curriculum. The *WritingPAD* project (Orr and Blythman 2004, Raien 2003, Lydiat 2003), along with other researchers and commentators in the field (Candlin 2001, Mayfield 2005), express concerns over the separation of theory and practice and propose models of teaching and learning that bring writing and making; knowledge of context, theory and practice, closer together, to be in line with the QAA subject benchmark statement on page 141-142 which sets out the broader aims of art and design education.

In view of the continuing dominance of academic writing, functioning

as a vehicle for facilitating student engagement with art theory and

contextualisation of practice, how effective is it for students in achieving that

objective? For students like Earnel, who has been taught the conventions

of academic writing, it can be highly effective, which is evident from

her responses at interview (see pp150-151). Historically, most students

studying for degrees, and teaching staff, would have been likely to have

similar educational backgrounds to Earnel. In recent years, the widening

participation agenda offers study opportunities for non-traditional learners

who comprise a much greater percentage of the student body than

previously. Knowledge of academic writing is not the sole criteria for

developing the ability to use it to make meaningful links between theory

and practice. Hannah makes use of teaching and learning support to help

her focus on the requirements of academic writing, and is successful if you

measure success by achieving good grades. If the function of academic

writing were to enable creative students to contextualize their practice,

Hannah would refute her success in this respect. She regards the work

she produced for assessment as highly prescriptive, and largely unrelated

to her practice. Her story reminds me of Wood's (2000:52) description of

academic writing as being to 'enable the writer to celebrate his/her non-tacit

knowledge of the topic and win approval from senior academicians'. Hannah

chooses to write the thesis her tutor wants her to write, but internally

she experiences feelings of resistance (Chase 1988). Tombola refuses to

comply with requirements and resists, writing for himself and taking the

consequences. Other co-researchers, Roger for example, is happy to opt for the accommodation model, and really just wants to be accepted as an academic. For Emma and Lesley the function of academic writing is immaterial, it is simply a means to get a qualification, and their irritation stems from their perception that the teaching and learning has not been effective in helping them to achieve the grade they wanted.

In what kinds of ways does the students' prior educational experience impact on their ability to engage with academic writing in their course?

I refer back to Fairclough (2001) who urges us to consider the prior experiences of students, to which he refers as members' resources, when we critically examine whether our educational practices privilege those social groups most traditionally established within the academic community. Lillis (2001) advocates a foregrounding of the diversity of students' prior social and cultural experiences to help students frame these factors as relevant to their learning. Established higher education practices such as academic writing are predicated on the assumption that students have been taught the conventions, when many have not. At conferences and in my workplace, I have often heard HE teaching staff, both in art and design and in other subject areas, express the view that they expect students to have academic writing skills when they begin their courses. Many do not, and the realization that it is an expectation drives them to try to obscure this, and generates a sense of shame about seeking help. This gulf between tutors and students prohibits communication between them and is hardly conducive to the student having a positive view of their own identity. In my

interview with students, many issues were raised over communication with tutors, and although these cannot always be attributed to issues surrounding non-inclusivity, it could be argued that it there is a strong link in some cases.

It is clear that some students want to be able to engage with traditional academic writing; Roger is an example of this. In Roger I wonder if I recognize elements of myself at the beginning of my Masters degree, when my motivation came from wanting to prove that I have the intellectual capacity to study at a higher level, having always felt like an outsider in an academic environment. As a person of a similar age and social class as Roger we share some of the same experiences and attitudes, and I too was desperate to be able to engage in intellectual debates from a linguistic platform shared with others, who I had always assumed were simply much brighter. It was only my Masters level study and my reading of Fairclough (2001), Ivanič (1998), Lillis (2001) and others that legitimized my underlying suspicions that the politics at play within academia contribute towards the marginalization of people like me. Having skills in academic writing is not all that is needed for the practice to be inclusive. Unlike Roger, I have learned to play the academic, although I still feel like an outsider. Emma, Lesley and Jane all acknowledge the incompatibility of their own identities within academic writing and feel the need to write as somebody else. And yet Teel falls comfortably into the role of writing creatively and conceptually within an academic framework, despite writing in a second language, perhaps because she may not view her identity as being situated in here, but in her own language. It begins to suggest that it is the history and politics of academic writing that are causing a problem as much as form and style.

Returning to Lillis' (2001:53) observation that education supports an 'institutional practice of mystery' around academic writing which 'works against those least familiar with the conventions surrounding academic writing' and limits their participation, this is evident from the data matrix (see Appendix 15, p261). Emma and Lesley make numerous references to having little idea how to produce a piece of academic writing, or how to address negative feedback in order to improve, and this peaks in the interview which took place as they were about to submit their draft. By comparison Tombola makes no reference to it, but never has any intention of conforming so this is not an issue for him. Jane is also confused as to what is required, but this may not such an acute problem for her as she works closely with dyslexia support staff. The data for Roger seems to suggest that the process of academic writing is becoming more of a mystery as time progresses. Hannah has made sure she has accessed support through workshops, so she does not appear to have had a problem conforming to the requirements of academic writing, but goes on to find it incompatible with the investigation she undertakes for her thesis. This centres on the tensions between her own identity as the writer and what her reader/assessor views as acceptable discourse in academic writing. Teel doesn't record any problem with understanding the requirements of the brief or the demands of academic writing. This may be because the majority of her education has taken place in Finland, and more research would need to be undertaken to examine why this might be. Grammar school student Earnel has become familiar with academic

writing throughout her secondary education and through her engagement with advanced level study in History and Psychology, which has helped her to master the skills required. Earnel is able to appreciate the function of writing better than other students and to conceptualize the links between research, writing and context. She records less concern than Pink Jim, who was educated at a secondary school, has always found writing difficult and thinks she may be dyslexic.

There are clearly issues that centre around knowing the conventions of academic writing. It might be argued that if Hannah can access help by attending the library sessions the institution is fulfilling its obligations to an extent, even if the way the workshops are presented to the students suggests they fall within a remedial model, rather than a mainstream option. Hannah was happy to justify her attendance in the acknowledgement that, as a mature student, she had not written an essay for some time, whereas some students might not want to be seen to need extra help. A more serious issue is that of the ambiguity and inconsistency within the assignment feedback from tutors, which is preventing the students from progressing and improving and lowering their confidence. It is highly likely that there are some tutors teaching the contextual studies element, which includes academic writing, who are not adequately qualified to do so, and that academic writing is almost as much of a 'mystery' to them as it is to the students. A continuation of my research would propose to investigate art and design tutor perspectives to pursue a greater insight into this phenomenon.

I have touched upon the notion that through their experiences my co-researchers, who are less familiar or comfortable with academic discourse, may be victims of a deliberate political act to maintain power for those groups most traditionally associated with academia. There is scope for further investigation into this question and currently I can only speculate that in some interactions with particular individuals within education it is possible, even probable. Another alternative, though, is that the sense of mystery surrounding the academic writing process, clearly felt by some students, is also shared by some of their tutors. This may be exacerbated by an incompatibility of academic writing practice with the creative process of art and design practice.

The issue of dyslexia

Continuing to look at whether the background of the student impacts on their ability to ability to engage in academic writing, it is clear from my research that for some of my co-researchers who are dyslexic, the requirement to write formally is a burden which impacts negatively on their educational experience and precludes them from achieving their full potential on the course as a whole. This aligns most closely to issues of inclusion. Tombola and Jane, as dyslexic learners, were examples of this within my data. Pink Jim and Teel also indicated that they suspected they might be dyslexic, but had never been statemented, although Teel did decide to be tested and the result was borderline. I can attempt to summarize the main issues surrounding writing for these students in art and design education emerging from my research.

- Frustration that they are not able to truly reflect their ability through existing methods of assessment

- Incompatibility of the process through which they must go in order to gain support with the difficulties they have as dyslexic learners – for example they have to complete complex paperwork to qualify for support or alternative assessment

- A reluctance to access support because of negative experiences in their education, such as being withdrawn from a class to be placed in a remedial group alongside disruptive or far less intelligent peers, in short the deficit model

- The lack of understanding amongst teaching staff about their condition, and predisposition for some staff to view them as lazy or difficult.

- In the studio, teaching and learning strategies which privilege learners who are competent at reading and writing

- The inflexible enforced practice of a linear design process incompatible with dyslexic learners' holistic approach to creativity.

The fact that four of my nine volunteer co-researchers are, or think they might be, dyslexic is probably a more accurate reflection of the art and design student community than official statistics suggest. For these students writing, and most certainly the rules, requirements and restrictions of academic writing, are a discriminatory factor in assessing their potential for demonstrating intellectual engagement with art and design. In Chapter Six where I presented data on alternative models of assessments, the two

students I interviewed from my own institution (one who undertook the project route in Architecture and one in Interior Architecture), had both opted for that model because they were dyslexic. Both had produced a piece of work which was relevant to their practice, personally satisfying. This had enabled them to achieve at a level which they felt was more commensurate with their academic ability. Their assessors had no reservations regarding the parity between the assessed project compared to the dissertation in respect of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and the external examiners' reports had been glowing.

Dyslexic students are discriminated against through the requirement to produce an extended piece of writing to evidence intellectual engagement with their subject. The high proportion of dyslexic learners in art and design (James 2003) compared to other disciplines reinforces the need to offer alternative modes of assessment in response to the Special Educational Needs Disability Act (SENDA) 2001. Although the SENDA act forced universities to draw up policies to accommodate students with disabilities (such as our own alternative assessment policy) these are well hidden within a text-heavy Student Guide, and teaching staff do not highlight the opportunities this offers to dyslexic students to negotiate a more appropriate model of assessment to meet their needs. Students like Tombola accept that they will under-perform in their written assessments. If they are to achieve highly they will have to compensate in the studio practice, as he did. His levels of knowledge and intellectual engagement with art and design are not acknowledged because his writing does not conform to traditional academic

conventions. This raises questions over what we are assessing. Why are we privileging the ability to engage with academic writing, something that artists may never do again, over developing credible practising artists? The exemplar which I downloaded from the ADI1 (see pp178-180) website of the viva voce model of assessment for dyslexic students, which enabled the young man who produced it to achieve highly in this aspect of his course, was every bit as rigorous as an example of academic enquiry as a dissertation would have been. All the models of assessment which I reviewed in Chapter Six have the potential to be as effective in evidencing all the learning outcomes identified in Appendix 2 (page 240), apart from the requirement for them to be evidenced through writing.

Does academic writing enable art and design students to link theory and practice?

Questions over the compatibility of academic writing with arts practice are highlighted in the literature (Wood 2000; Mayfield 2005, Raein 2003) highlighting dichotomies in teaching, learning and practice between the process of writing and making art. Eisner (2004) and Wood (2000) suggest reframing teaching and learning with closer reference to creative processes. Candlin (2001) suggests that the condition and spaces for this emanate from the development of research-based PhDs.

Do compatibility issues centre on deficits in teaching the skills needed to write in the prescribed way before students reach the more independent nature of undergraduate study? Academic writing could well have its place alongside arts practice in the right conditions. For example, Teel's piece of

writing is a fine example of where academic writing is complementary to arts

practice. It conforms to all the conventions of the essay, and opens up the

opportunity to look at cross-disciplinary practices and explore how writing

and visual arts are inextricably linked through the creative process. I am

reminded again of the two quotations I highlighted on page 45, one of which

refers to the creation of a piece of writing and one a piece of visual art, but

which could easily be interchangeable. It is a piece of work that requires Teel

to look at the world in a different way and investigate new possibilities. It is

fascinating to read because it contains some innovative thinking, expanding

the writer's and the reader's perceptions of the relationship between

classical architecture and the sonnet. It may be significant that Teel is the

only person who is not bound up in the class system that characterizes

our culture in the UK. Earnel is more confident that she is able to link her

writing to her practice than the other UK co-researchers, but is her sense

of identity as an academic rooted in her social and cultural background?

My own experience of continuing to feel like an outsider in an academic

environment, which resonates with a number of colleagues, might suggest

that the 'problem' of academic writing is a deeper issue than effectiveness

of teaching. A measure of the compatibility with art and design practice

might be derived from the data (Appendix 15, p261): Tombola shows the

most consistent referencing of his writing to his practice in the interviews;

Teel does in her second interview, once she has had feedback from one

assignment and is working on another; and Earnel records the most, despite

there only having been one opportunity for discussion. Tombola, on his own

admission, has made his writing link to his practice, but showed little respect

for the conventions of academic writing in the process.

So is academic writing the most appropriate complement to art students'

practice? Teel's work demonstrates that it can be, but this is highly

dependent on a number of conditions which surround its production:

- The student must be familiar with academic writing conventions, or
  must have ongoing academic support to develop and practise the skills
  to engage with academic writing

- Explicit links should be able to be made between the student's creative
  practice and their place within the historical development of art and design
  and contemporary practice, to make contextual studies, truly contextual
  and reflect the spirit of the subject benchmark statement to enable
  students to 'develop a range of cognitive abilities related to the aesthetic,
  the moral and the social contexts of human experience.' (QAAHE 2002)

- The teaching, learning, support and practice of writing should
  discourage isolation and draw on the social theory of learning: meaning
  '– learning as experience; community – learning as belonging; practice
  – learning as doing; and, identity – learning as becoming' (Wenger
  1998). Paying attention to these themes should encourage student-
  centred approaches to academic learning in art and design practice,
  and promote more inclusive practice within existing frameworks.

- Continue to reframe academic writing to enable the 'I' to occupy a
  comparable proportion within writing to its position within creative
  practice. There should be more room for creativity in writing.

The writing experiences of my co-researchers do not suggest that these conditions are met within the site of my research.

Are other means of evidencing art students' engagement with theory more appropriate and effective than academic writing?

The additional data I generated in response to this question, which I presented in the previous chapter, has links to all the primary research questions. Looking at each in turn, ADI1, the viva voce model was originally developed as an accommodation model for dyslexic students. The exemplar downloaded from the institution's website demonstrated its effectiveness mapped against the assessment criteria for a dissertation and this was endorsed by external examiners. Undoubtedly for dyslexic students this alternative mode of assessment offers a more equitable option than academic writing, requiring a comparable body of evidence. It was interesting to note that not many students had opted for the viva voce, in view of the documented incidence of dyslexia among the art and design student population. This may be fear of the unknown, being different or, as ADI3 Dean discussed in the interview discussing the project option, students' recognition that they are not taking a 'soft' option. Both of the ADI3 students were dyslexic and recognized that they would be unlikely to achieve at levels commensurate with their ability within a dissertation model. They both came across as ambitious and highly motivated students, and were clearly prepared to put in the effort towards a grade that was comparable with their studio work, and this would not be true of all students. The project model developed by ADI3 was not dissimilar to that

of ADI4 and within both, through the data generated, the requirements for academic engagement through research, and knowledge of the historical and contextual influence behind their project work was clearly evident. All three models discussed in this section were reported as not having attracted much take-up from students.

The 'live trading' model developed by ADI2 attracted a higher percentage of students. The evidence I managed to gather in the data was not as convincing as with the other models, where I was given access to course documentation that detailed the requirements for assessment and the criteria for judging outcomes. From the telephone conversation with ADI2 Tutor, and the press release I was unconvinced of the parity of academic content. It appeared to be a purely vocational model, and I could see that students would be attracted to this from an employability perspective, especially if they were planning a career of enterprise or self-employment. For students within the decorative arts disciplines, this would be particularly helpful, but with reference again to the QAA subject benchmark statement (see page 141), I could not make the connections I would expect to see, on a conceptual or intellectual level.

ADI5 was the most radical approach, and not located in England, which may account for this. This was the only example where the dissertation was not normative. Outcomes were dependent on the course and students were expected to evidence academic engagement with historical and contemporary practice and contextual influences within their studio practice through negotiated written outcomes, visual work, digital outcomes or anything fit for purpose. ADI5 Tutor's assertion that 'art students are

engaged with a practice; they don't just reflect upon culture, they make

it' places the identity of the student at the centre of their work. The other

models I looked at had features that addressed some of the key contextual

issues underpinning my research, but the ADI5 model seems to offer the

flexible and reactive solutions needed for art and design education in the

21st century.

Final reflections

With this in mind, lastly, I want to reflect on the social and cultural changes

that have emerged as a result of advances in technology. I found an article by

Richardson and Adams St Pierre (2005:924) almost by accident when I was

writing this thesis. It resonated with many of the feelings I was having while

writing, and although the quote is long, I reproduce it because I empathize

with the sentiments, and it echoes my worst fears about my own work.

> A decade ago […], I confessed that for years I had yawned
> my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative
> studies. Countless numbers of texts had I abandoned half read,
> half scanned. I would order a new book with great anticipation
> – the topic was one I was interested in, the author someone I
> wanted to read – only to find the text boring. In "coming out"
> to colleagues and students about my secret displeasure with
> much of qualitative writing. I found a community of like-minded
> discontents. Undergraduates, graduates, and colleagues alike
> said they found much of qualitative writing to be – yes – boring.

I have stated the aims for my research in this document. I feel very strongly

that the way we are asking our art students, and perhaps students from

other subject areas too, to evidence their intellectual engagement with the

subject is dry and boring, and as far removed from the wonder of learning and discovery as it is possible to get. And that is not a rejection of writing or being brilliant, insightful, innovative and creative, but a rejection of academic writing in its traditional, constraining and most exclusive sense. Will my arguments ever reach a wider audience when this document will sit alongside all the others, having been read only by my assessors? Richardson and Adams St Pierre (2005:924) continue:

> It seemed foolish at best, and narcissistic and wholly self-absorbed at worst, to spend months or years doing research that ended up not being read and not making a difference to anything but the author's career.

When writing the first draft of this document I strayed onto the OU EdD website, as a justifiable displacement activity, to revisit some of the comments from seminars. The first one I saw entitled *New Media and Doctoral Research* was one I didn't remember from my first year, and one of the set tasks was to look at a video on YouTube and watch Mike Wesch's video *The Machine is Us/ing Us* (2007), and to write down initial reactions. I joined in and these were my first reflections:

> **God how much has changed since I started my study in 2008! I watched the *Students Today* video, which I'd first seen as a trainer for the new diplomas. How did I feel? I felt that education is lagging behind and we are at risk of failing the students. There's so much information that they need to assimilate in such a short space of time. Then I watched the next video by Wesch. I picked on the comment about digital text separating form and content as needing more thought. The importance of hyperlink – how much more effective for**

**the reader of my thesis if they could click a link back to the
pages I'd signposted rather than spend time turning pages. I
thought that the video was much quicker and more effective
way of assimilating a lot of information and ideas, and the
visual material illustrated ideas and supported the processing
of the information and understanding. In order to have
processed and understood the content of that short video in
written form, I would have had to read pages of material and
it would have taken ages.**

At this point it seemed appropriate to revisit the quotation from Burgess et
al (2006) regarding the structure of the thesis (see page 62). I looked back
at the seminar archive from my own year, which was very short and mostly
concerned with technical issues around viewing materials. After I wrote
this reflective statement, I revisited the website to examine the posts. I was
interested in a comment made by Altaf Malik (17 March 2011) 'Producing
video and audio materials by the educators has never been easy and hardly
an educator's job.' I would broadly agree with this, but perhaps this is
where art and design education could be leading the way. Our tutors are all
creative practitioners within different visual arts disciplines and many already
possess exactly those skills that would enable them to produce video and
audio materials without undertaking training: film and video; animation;
games design; web designers specifically. But many are increasingly
computer literate. For a student of art and design surely it is more
appropriate to visual arts practice to produce visual means of evidencing
intellectual engagement with historical and contemporary issues around
our work, and situating their place within that? They are far more likely to

be able to transfer those skills into the context of their practice. Returning

to the seminar once more, Daniel Bosman's (20 March 2011) comment

encapsulates one of the biggest issues for me:

> My emotional reaction to these videos was that I felt scared, old-
> fashioned in my understanding of what education is or should be
> and not quite ready for all this.

I am also scared, and feel a natural resistance to a move away from

the comfortable familiar practices that characterize my own experience

of education. I have spent years trying to master traditional academic

conventions, and it is ironic that now I may be on the brink of achieving

the ultimate accolade within that system, I may be rejecting them!

The stories of my co-researchers, and numerous other stories not

formally documented as these have been, persuade me that change

has to happen and education needs to adapt to a rapidly changing

societal and technological world. I am reminded of an incident in my

own undergraduate education when my printing technology tutor was

teaching us how to set type in hot metal. He made a throwaway comment

something along the lines of 'of course they're trying to introduce

this new-fangled photo typesetting, but it'll never catch on'. It soon

replaced hot metal and in turn was superseded by desktop publishing

programmes within less than a decade. What happened was progress.

New technologies enable a greater scope for creativity, innovation

and excellence in type design. It was not a denigration of the skill,

precision and delightfully tactile nature of the construction of type for

communication which characterized hot metal, just as the invention of the

printing press did not detract from hand-produced scripts, it was different

and exciting and widened access to information and capacity for and

speed of production.

I return to a consideration of the Mike Wesch video *A Vision of Students*

Today and Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) highlighting the position

occupied by visual culture in society today with the emergence of new

media. If I think about the skills I had to develop back in the late 1970s

in order to become a graphic designer, and compare those to the skills

today's designers have to acquire, there is considerably more ground to

cover. There has been a huge shift in emphasis, and new processes have

inevitably superseded some wonderful highly skilled practices, many

of which are mourned by the older generation of designers. With these

in mind I return to the introduction of this chapter, and would propose

that it is time to move on from the traditional model of academic writing,

particularly in art and design education and in respect of the technology

today which enables students to communicate in multi-dimensional mode,

with much greater potential for exploiting the full range of texts, visual,

aural and written which comprise, reflect and expand their experience in

today's world.

Greenbank et al (2008:4) highlight a contradiction between the perceived

academic currency of the dissertation and the inconsistency in

'rationale, form, function and assessment' across disciplines and degree

programmes. Their study, undertaken across a range of subject areas

within their home university, has a broader reach in this respect than my

own research, but there are parallels to be drawn in the questions raised for future practice. In terms of the broad categorisation of subjects into descriptors such as 'Social Sciences', 'Arts and Humanities' and so on, right through to the micro-divisions within Fine Art such as, for example: Video; Installation; Painting; and Sculpture; diversity in the nature of the dissertation must surely be inevitable. The problem lies in the absence of a really convincing and widely understood rationale underpinning the design and assessment of the dissertation and its relationship to the learning aims of the discipline as set out in our nationally agreed subject benchmark statements. By widely understood, I mean by both teaching staff and students. My own research, and other examples from which I have drawn, leaves me unconvinced that this is currently the case. This appears to be an issue not just in the relatively narrow field of the visual arts, but also seems to apply to a much wider range of subject aress. With this in mind, the design and assessment of models through which to assess whether students are meeting the learning objectives of their discipline, should also be questionning whether the dissertation is the most appropriate mode of assessment, or whether alternatives could be a richer option in relation to the subject area in a rapidly changing world. Where decisions are made to include the dissertation as an essential, relevant and valuable component of assessment within particular degree programmes, greater attention needs to be paid to the diversity of the student cohort to ensure that all students are sufficiently prepared to undertake that task with a fair degree of confidence and competence, through the design and assessment of written work and academic support leading up to the introduction of the

dissertation module. This is not to suggest that the same consideration regarding the identity and diversity of the student body would not be given to the design and development and assessment of alternative models.

I hope that others might be encouraged to engage in research which addresses issues I have raised around academic writing, both within the visual arts and beyond. However, from a personal perspective, I remain unconvinced that my colleagues or students in art and design, or other disciplines, will find the structure and form of this thesis engaging. I am concerned that in its current format, it will become one of those dusty tomes that fail to reach the audience whom I would like to engage and have little or no influence on future practice. I plan to adapt it by creating a 'film of the book' and thus be able to offer it to a wider audience in the hope that it may provoke some reflections that might impact on practice. As an artist, I would also like to try to demonstrate that a combination of texts, visual, verbal and written might offer a more stimulating, multidimensional, and intriguing option that demands less time from the audience, without compromising on content.

Postscript ...an update on my co-researchers

> We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality.
> We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories.
>
> Stake (1995:1)

Stake's reference to the constituent factors which contribute to a case study, focuses squarely on the human element of research. My own experience, that of the participants in my research, and interactions with students over the period of my practice in education, highlight the significance of the social and affective aspects of teaching and learning. This is supported by a vast bank of research across disciplines and cultures, a small selection of which I have drawn upon for my study. In this final section, I offer an update on the stories of my co-researchers, not only because I am interested in their stories, but because the reflections they shared with me on their learning and the choices they have made for the future, have influenced the recommendations I make for future practice in the light of my research.

I visited the final degree shows of almost every participant in the research, and experienced how they presented their selves through their work. Some of the work surprised me and offered different insights into the participants as individuals, not necessarily in opposition to impressions I had drawn, but provided additional depths. On reflection, I feel I could have drawn upon their visual work to a much greater extent in addressing my research questions, particularly around the links between theory and practice. I include images of the work I viewed and photographed and present them here as I experienced them, at the end of the story. I would suggest that you look at the work before you read the accompanying text.