



# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Academic blogging, academic practice and academic identity

### Journal Item

How to cite:

Kirkup, Gill (2010). Academic blogging, academic practice and academic identity. *London Review of Education*, 8(1) pp. 75–84.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2010 Taylor Francis

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/14748460903557803>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

## **Academic Blogging: academic practice and academic identity.**

### **Abstract:**

This paper describes a small scale study which investigates the role of blogging in professional academic practice in higher education. It draws on interviews with a small sample of academics (scholars, researchers and teachers) who have blogs and on the author's own reflections on blogging to investigate the professional benefits and costs of academic blogging. It argues that blogging offers a new genre of authoritative and accessible academic textual production, and in this way is changing the nature of what it is to be a twenty first century academic practitioner.

### ***Introduction- writing an academic identity.***

Work on academic literacies (Ivanic, 1998), takes the position that all writing is a presentation of the self, in a post-modern framework it would even be described as a 'performance' of the self (Butler, 1999). However the practice of academic writing is understood as problematic for both students and academics. For example authors in the collection by Williams (2006) argue that the identities created through traditional kinds of scholarly writing styles embed values, and world views that run counter to both the identities that students bring to higher education as well as the identities that a more diverse 'workforce' of scholars, researchers, and teachers now embodies. What has and should constitute valid academic writing is being challenged, and it is into this landscape that blogging as potentially a new kind of academic literacy enters.

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

The work 'blog' as a noun to describe a specific kind of website and as a verb to describe the process of authoring this website are now in such common use that they need no explanation. The activity of blogging is mature enough for some of the early enthusiasts and promoters of blogging to argue that it has been co-opted into the mainstream media and consequently lost its power as a democratic and accessible tool for self-expression and community building (Lovink, 2008). This may reflect the sentiments of those who valued blogging a radical oppositional activity, but for many including academics blogging has become useful only now that it a widespread and widely understood medium.

Recent educational literature has given a long list of educational reasons why blogging is useful for students (see for example Farmer, 2006, and Kerawalla et al 2008, 2009, these last two articles describe work that the author of this journal was also involved with) these include: as a reflective journal, as a notebook to record events and developing ideas, as an aggregator of resources, and as a tool for creating community and conversation with fellow students. Blogging might provide students with alternative sites for academic identity creation that are less problematic than traditional ones. But there has been only limited enthusiasm for blogging by scholars and researchers. .

A significant reason for this is that traditional forms of scholarly production do not recognize blogging as an academic product: *'For most academics, blogs are irrelevant because they don't count as publications'* (Lovink 2008 p 4). In the UK the importance for career advancement and institutional research assessment of printed monographs and

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

publications in peer reviewed journals has been a discouragement from investing time in the activity of blogging. A US recent book about digital scholarship, discounts blogging on the first page where it is listed with other “*stuff*” – *the unverified and unverifiable statements of individuals, discussions on listservs ... questionable advertisements for questionable products and services, and political and religious screeds in all languages.*’ (Borgman 2007, p 1), and contrasts this “stuff” with ‘*the substantial portion of online content [that] is extremely valuable for scholarship*’. Despite this, the academic practices of scholars, researchers and teachers are changing, it has become accepted scholarly practice to cite websites as sources, and some scholars have developed a professional reputation for their blogging.

Another reason for the wariness of many academics to blogging could be the subjective style of many blogs, a style which seems oppositional to traditional forms of academic text which value an ‘objective’ authorial voice. Hyland (2002) describes this as writing which focuses on the management and presentation of information above the management and presentation of self. Perhaps those academics described by the author in Williams (2006) book who feel the most conflict between the identity available to them through traditional forms of scholarly writing and alternative conflicting identities (for example of race, class) will find that blogging offers them a form of writing which better enables them to perform new, and less conflicted kinds of academic identity.

This paper is a small scale investigation into why some academics produce blogs and the perceived value of this activity to their academic practice, and their academic identity. It

Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

builds on the work of Gregg who argues for 'blogging as conversational scholarship', which makes 'scholarly work accessible and accountable to a readership outside the academy' (Gregg, 2006 p 147-8) and offers a platform for the performance of new academic identities.

### ***Blogademia***

Blogging as an activity is not only about creating scholarly products, it is 'performative writing' (Gregg, 2006). It creates identity through the production of what Giddens (1994) describes as a narrative about the self, but it also does this by providing an alternative medium through which to do it. Ewins (2005) argues that blogs contribute to the creation of what Gergen (2000) defines as 'multiphrenic' identity; that is an identity not only created out of a variety of narratives, but performed and presented through a variety of media. This is part of what makes a post-modern identity different from the kinds of identities that have been available to us historically. There are now potentially a huge range of media and kinds of narratives we can engage with to explicitly create identities for ourselves. A similar way of seeing this is as a Foucauldian 'technology of the self' (Lovink, 2008), and since academics are professionals engaged in the continuous development of a professional 'self', blogging could play a role in such professional identity creation. This places blogging as an academic activity in a much more useful and potentially powerful position than Borgman had placed it.

Saper (2006) was the first to categorise academic blogging as being a particular genre of blogging which he labelled: 'Blogademia'. Academic bloggers, he argued, did not see blogging as part of the production of knowledge in their disciplines because blogs did not

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

go through any peer review or editorial process. Consequently he saw blogs by academics that ‘*often air dirty laundry, gripes, complaints, rants, and raves, what those blogs add to research seems outside scholarship*’ ( Saper 2006). This kind of writing, he argued, is engaged in discussing the social processes of knowledge production and it should be valued as ‘*a vehicle to comprehend mood, atmosphere, personal sensibility, and the possibilities of knowledge outside the ego’s conscious thought.*’ Blogs he asserted are one of the future tools of academia. At the same time others were beginning to discuss the risks for employees of all kinds who write about their work. Benton (2006) discussed his own experience of blogging and how it had expanded from something quite small which he did with his students to a public blog with a much wider scope of interest. (He is still – 2009 - blogging pseudonymously in his original blog.). He noted the concerns that people expressed about the sensitivity of employers to what was said about them, and about what an employee might be writing outside of their academic publications. McCullagh (2009) explored the issue of privacy and the professional impact of blogging with a large sample of over 1,000 bloggers of all types. She noted: ‘*Bloggers’ privacy boundaries in the workplace have not yet been clearly established, either socially or legally. Accordingly [...] organisations should provide blogging guidelines for employees.*’ (McCullagh, 2009, p 20)

Walker (2006) recognised more variety in academic blogs. She had blogged as a graduate student but when she became a member of academic staff she found blogging more difficult. She identified three genres of academic blog: public intellectuals, research logs, and pseudonymous blogs about academic life. She speculated about whether blogs were

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

a good medium to popularise research. Ward (2006) also began blogging as a graduate student and understood her activity as a form of ethnography. Gregg (2009) has more recently examined the public blogs of a number of post-graduate students and young academics using Walker's categories. She sees these particular academic blogs as an expression of a subculture, of people who are struggling to make a life in their chosen career as a scholar and researcher. She is interested in how this subculture is examining and critiquing the role and function of the academy and the employment practices within it.

Although authors like Farmer (2006) assert that there are '*numerous examples of academic bloggers taking advantage of blogs in order to engage with their peers and students and to reflect on their own learning*'; given the scale of traditional academic production the number of academic bloggers seems actually quite small.

### ***The personal context for this study***

Like Ewins, Gregg, Walker, Ward and Saper, my own interest in blogging began when I explored it as part of my own academic practice. My own blog reflected on problematic work issues and I was interested in finding a community of people engaged with similar issues. I was also testing the limits of the medium to engage with this kind of material. I was in Walker's category of blogging about academic life but not doing it pseudonymously. It became clear to me very soon that blogging is a genre of writing with its own demands. Not only did I have to struggle with 'what' I could say in public I found I had to develop a voice for the blog, decide the relationship between my public (blog) identity and other professional and private identities. I had to think about my audience, the frequency of my posts, and scope of my content. I was not working with any model

Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

blog in mind, so my blogging felt like a personal journey of discovery. However I reached a point after two years when I decided to enquire more formally into the blogging practices of other academics to see if some models of academic blogging were more successful as academic practice than others.

### ***The institutional context for the study.***

There are now a variety of staff blogging activities being supported by the University where I work. The most publicised, and the most ‘polished’ ones, are those that the University runs as part of its public communications activities. There is a University website called *Platform*, which is open to the world and is clearly directed at a wide audience including students but also those who might stumble across this site while searching for the topics discussed there. This site aggregates posts by invited contributors grouped under various headings university academic staff are invited to write as experts on some aspect of national or international interest. The site functions to deliver trustworthy ‘open content’ and as a marketing channel for the University’s products. It ‘belongs’ to the institution rather than to the individuals who write the posts. It enhances the identity or ‘brand’ of the organisation. This kind of blog is now a part of the websites of many companies since Scoble and Isreal published ‘*Naked Conversations: How Blogs are Changing the Way Businesses talk with Customers*’ (Scoble and Isreal, 2006).

The University also hosts a blogging platform for both individual staff and students. Initially the provision was focussed on students; as part of the University’s online learning platform. Staff began using it to host their blogs; many found it easier than



## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

hosting them on external platforms. Other staff continue to choose external platforms in order to create a sense of professional identity separate from that of the institution in which they work. The University lists, on the internal staff website, all the staff blogs that it hosts. Early in 2009 there were 60 of these and only about two thirds were public. A number of these internal blogs functioned as forums for discussion of internal working practices and consultation forums, some simply provided information. A surprisingly small number were authored by academic staff reflecting on their work and open for public readership..

### ***Method.***

#### **Collecting a sample of academic bloggers**

I began searching for my sample of academic bloggers from colleagues in my own department (an institute of educational technology). Eleven individuals out of a department containing 40 academics were listed in early 2009 as having blogs; eight of these were academic staff; however of these only four were posting regularly. The others had created a blog but had not written posts for many months. This is not a lot of blogging activity, even accounting for the fact that some colleagues might be keeping pseudonymous blogs that they don't want listed, and have hosted elsewhere. The fact that only one in ten academics were actively keeping a work-related blog, suggests that in 2009 blogging is still a minority activity even among those most active in online technologies. This is about the same proportion as the 13% of the total US population reported by the Pew Research Centre as having at some time created a blog (Lenhart and Fox 2009).

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

I also used the University's list of institutionally hosted blogs selecting only those blogs that were owned by academic staff and open to the public. From both these sources I had a list of twelve people who I contacted with a request for an interview. Of these I was able to interview six. Three of the six are drawn from my own department (Educational Technology), one from Sociology, one from Literature and one from Biology (the latter working in another institution). They ranged in seniority from professors, senior lecturers, a lecturer and a post-doctoral researcher. Only one of them was a woman. In my own institution academic women are much less likely to be regular bloggers than men, even in the field of educational technology, I have anonymised their names. Some of my sample had blogs with a large, regular readership; others (including my own) were read mostly by friends and colleagues. Such a small opportunistic sample cannot of course claim any statistical validity but despite their wide ranging subject areas and different levels of seniority common themes about the nature of academic blogging emerged.

### **Data collection**

Each blogger was interviewed using a common interview schedule, but each interview was allowed to take different directions as I probed the particular practices and context of each blogger. Four of the interviews were carried out face-to-face, and two were done by telephone. All the interviews were recorded digitally and I also took handwritten notes. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and an hour.

### **Data analysis.**

The analysis was done using the audio files and transcribing only those parts of the interview that represented themes, or succinct ideas and concepts. The initial analysis used the interview questions as themes around which to group the data. A second analysis

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

was then done to identify emergent themes coming out of the responses. This paper focuses on those themes to do with blogs as genres of academic writing done in the process of performing an academic identity.

### **Themes**

#### **Why have a blog?**

All but one of my interviewees had taken up blogging because they wanted to write about their subject/research area but in a different, less formal medium, but at least initially to the same audience of people who they normally engaged with. The two educational technology academics were aware that an educational technology community of bloggers existed before they joined it. They felt that blogging was an activity they needed to experience as a professional in their discipline

Even those who were familiar with blogging from reading other academic blogs did not find creating their own an easy task. ‘Professor M’ had friends who were active bloggers and he wanted to create a blog for himself, but it wasn’t until his third attempt that he really got established:

*‘I started it on study leave when I was writing a book. I had lots of content.... It was a good way to explore some of the ideas that were in the book.... It wasn’t the blog of the book... I wanted to keep a blog.... I had the spare time... thinking time as I was writing the book. I explored some of the ideas I’d already written about in the book. Often the problem with a blog is getting enough momentum going – the book allowed me to do that.’*

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

'Dr K' started blogging when she responded to a request made to her department for volunteers to write something for the University blog : *Platform*. She was offered all the technical help she needed and she took this as an opportunity to '*have a go*' at writing for a different medium. After this experience she began her own issues-based blog: '*I do it about the issues I think other people aren't doing. I ask "the other question"'. I do what's missing [in an issue] mostly in terms of race and gender....I bring feminist theory to sport which isn't often done.*'

'Dr D' also began blogging because he was invited to be part of a group blog. This blog involved authors from across a number of institutions who were working in the same scientific field. He was the most junior member of the group, but became the primary author of posts. His blog is about the 'ideas' that interest the authors – mainly issues to do with evolutionary biology and unlike other blogs here one of its main functions is to provide a conversation between the authors.

'Professor R' was expert in a variety of written genres, he wrote and published fiction as well as scholarly publications and he kept a private journal for himself. He was also interested in other people's diaries: '*these documents have a lot to say to the future*'. He set up his blog initially to replace his personal journal. The blog became he said '*violently professional*', partly because he saw that was what others were doing. However the personal element remained, and the blog enables him to talk more personally about literature – more than he would normally do in his other academic writing.

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

'Mr A' was the only person in my sample who was not blogging about an area of expertise. He had previously published in a humorous column in a staff newspaper. He described that as *'pre-blogging'*. It was an experience in which he *'found that I had a bit of a voice and liked writing humorous/provocative things'*. When his column was stopped he felt that he didn't have an outlet for this voice. He first built an institutional website but when he was advised not to put his content there, blogging became his *'third avenue to try'*. Because there was institutional sensitivity about some of his content he set up a blog that was not on the University's platform, and made it open to the public. He described his aim for his blog as having *'somewhere where any staff could talk about issues that there is nowhere else to talk about in the University.'* It is a place where he can *'say things I felt (sounds a bit grand to say) ought to be said [when] something is nagging away, and I just get it out of my system'*. For him the freedom to write what he wants in the blog is an important aspect of academic freedom.

No one had explicitly created their blog as an avenue for self-publicity. However, it might not be clear when a *'technology of the self'* turns into the kind of *'technology of self-promotion'* criticized by Lovink (2008). Only one person felt that their blogging had a negative impact on their professional career, and others felt there was no impact. For some of these bloggers the satisfaction of the activity itself was what kept them going. 'Mr A' for example described himself as a quiet introvert who found his voice by accident, his blog had become for him maybe the most important public voice that contributes to his multiphrenic self .

## **Blogging as one medium in a multiphrenic environment of academic production.**

There is a strong indirect relationship between the writing people did in their blogs and other professional academic writing. As the bloggers became familiar with the medium of blogging they were surprised to find that it had its own rules, it was not simply as a notebook, or a place for making drafts which might be turned later into full scholarly publications. 'Dr C' described this very clearly: *'I fondly imagined that a blog would be a good way of getting ideas off the ground for papers and proposals and things like that -- it doesn't do that...for a paper the hard bit isn't getting your ideas into shape...the hard bit is locating them in the literature in a rigorous and full way...the initial draft of a paper often looks like a blog post and I could just post it.. ..but I don't choose to because it doesn't feel finished'*. He described how a paper is reworked with gaps and unevenness, while a blog post has to have its own sense of being *'complete'*. He worried that some journals would be unhappy about a paper that had been uploaded into a blog. *'I end up not blogging about some of my favourite ideas because I want to save them for a paper - which I never get round to writing.... Too much effort to blog and write a paper on the same topic.... I don't have so many good ideas I can afford to throw them away in blog' ....Blogging doesn't get much credit'*. 'Dr C' also describes what he calls the *'hierarchy of levels of reflection and thinking and effort'* that go into creating texts for different media. He *'bangs out a tweet<sup>ii</sup>*, but a blog takes a little bit longer. He is careful not to make *'stupid mistakes'* in his blog posts. But compared to a blog *'a paper needs full referencing .. it is heavier and takes a longer time to come out.'*

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

'Professor R' also described how he composed his posts like '*little articles*'. He considered their length (about 500 words) and tried to create a post as a '*rounded piece*'. He estimated that it took him about two hours to create a post.

'Dr K' who has also published extensively in traditional academic media found that the blog fed into her other writing. 'Dr D' felt that the blog had helped him gain confidence and facility in his writing. He described his style as becoming increasingly short: '*I write posts faster and rapidly express things and not have to struggle to produce a whole published concept before I share it with someone. I am more confident about sharing my ideas with people. Being a young academic, I don't feel confident about the ideas I have.*' But he worried that the facility to 'publish' a blog gives a false sense of achievement: '*when you have finished [your post] there's a button at the bottom saying: 'publish' and academic publishing is the currency, the most important thing to do....up to a point (blogging) is parasitizing the importance of publishing. Because you have pressed this button saying 'publish' and you feel great when you have done it.... Stimulating me to think that I am publishing when I am actually not*'.

At the other end of the spectrum 'Professor M' who has published numerous books and scholarly articles found that his very active blogging had reduced the need he felt to do so much scholarly writing. The online 'conversations' he was involved in with a large numbers of 'followers' and other bloggers, satisfied his need to engage with others about new ideas. . '*[There is a] 'noticeable decrease in formal publications since I started blogging.....The reason I used to write papers – not just for professional recognition but*

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

*partly writing papers was a creative writing exercise ...that creative writing itch has been scratched by blogging...I don't feel the need to publish formally so much. Secondly the ideas sharing you want to get from formal publication I get more quickly and more satisfyingly from blogging. The motivation to publish has diminished somewhat.'*

'Professor M' put significant time and effort into his blog. Like 'Professor R' he saw blogs as things that are finished and conform to a particular form and certain standards.

Only for 'Mr A', who was not writing about his subject area but about his working environment, was his blog writing not a development which had synergies with his other academic writing. He described his blog as the '*opposite*' of the kind of research writing he did. He was very critical of this kind of research writing which he described as very controlled and disciplined and somehow had the '*life sucked out of it*'.

Nearly all the bloggers used in other online channels as well as traditional print publication channels. Unsurprisingly the educational technologists were greatest users of and experimenters with new online applications, but there seemed to be no age correlation between using a great deal of online media and not doing so. While these bloggers saw a relationship between their formal publications and their blogs, they tended to use other online media to draw readers' attention to their blogs, some sending an email message or a 'tweet' to a list of contacts when they had published a new post.



## Who is the Audience for academic blogs?

None of the sample (including myself) were writing with students in mind as the main audience for their blog, and there was no direct relationship between their teaching and their blogging. Although 'Dr K's blog was related to the course she taught when she set it up, she now addressed a much wider audience, and the idea of this wider audience freed her up to use her blog to explore her ideas. *'[Blogging] is not teaching where you have to explain yourself and support what you are saying. In teaching you are thinking about the person reading it: is this completely clear- will they understand this? In academic writing you are thinking: Have I supported my arguments? Where is my evidence? But with the blog you are thinking about developing your ideas. There's a bit more of the personal in it. It's quiet kind of deliberating; you learn a bit about what...how you think.'*

'Professor R' also felt that his blog was not a channel to talk to students, or to talk to his peers in his discipline (whom, he suspected, would think his blog was trivial); instead he like Dr K wanted to talk to those with common interests: *'At first I thought that no one was reading [the blog], then people told me that they were. So when I found out that people were reading it I thought I should make it more accessible, and wondered how to get a dialogue going'.*

'Dr C' had a clear picture of his audience, because of the local feedback he got ; *'it is made up of university and related 'techy' folk. I make the assumption that they are reasonably comfortable with technology'.* As I note earlier 'Dr D' saw the main

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

audience for the blog as his fellow authors but that did not stop him wishing it had a bigger following.

'Mr A' compared his attitude to his blog to his attitude to his other hobbies: *'If I enjoy doing it and like the product myself, why do I need to show it to anyone?'* and yet he went on to admit that he was *'I am quite attention hungry so it's funny that I carry on with this blog without feedback'*. His attitude to his audience was very complex. He worried that if he thought too much about his audience it might inhibit his writing, and yet he used an email list of friends and colleagues to send his blog posts to them as emails.

All of the sample, even the most well known got few comments posted by readers, and some of these comments were simply the verbal equivalent of applause, not the beginning of the conversation. That most looked for. Shirky's internet power laws (Shirky 2003) argue that a kind of Pareto Principle applies in social networking; that a small number of sites/people will get all the 'hits' and the majority will have very few. The bloggers in this study expected to have very few readers, but all hoped they could get more.

However, such a situation is the usual one for traditional academic publications. Authors hope they will have many citations and their books will go into reprints, but this happens only to a minority. So for academic bloggers, the potential reach of blogs, even when it produces only a small audience is so much greater they would expect for traditional academic publications.

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

It would seem that the idea of an audience is more important to these bloggers than an actual audience, practicing an identity for themselves was more important than others seeing it.

### **The costs of blogging.**

An important question for academic bloggers is whether there are any professional reputation costs involved. Did blogging contribute to a higher profile academic identity? 'Professor M', it was noted earlier, felt that there had been a trade off between his formal publication output and his blogging which could be a professional cost depending on the career stage one was at. 'Dr D' who was the least well established in his career, felt his blogging was not *'career advancing or self-interested... I put my name to my blog – I don't know whether it costing me anything to blog .... I don't think I have any reputation costs on the line. I don't particularly regard it as a plus point in my career.... But reputation costs are not nonexistent; I don't tell everyone that I do it.'*

Two of the established bloggers had felt some negative criticism from the Institution about the content of their blog. 'Mr A', who had used humour to critique the role and function of the academy and the employment practices in it, but had not done this pseudonymously, felt that his blogging had a negative impact on his career. He remarked: *'There is no chance of a Chair once you start this kind of writing'*. He had received comments from senior managers that some the content of his blog should be removed. Because of this, his blog is no longer so work-related and he worries that it has become rather 'bland'.

Even 'Professor M' had once received criticism from the institution about the content of his blogging: *'When I was the director of a project with commercial sensitivity I had to be more sensitive about what I said. People higher up thought I was being too open about developments that were commercially sensitive'*

These issues of reputation cost and impact on careers have to be taken seriously. As well as overt attempts by an institution to constrain the content of blogs some of my bloggers felt that others –peers in the discipline, or managers the institution would see their blog as not academically serious enough.

## **Conclusions**

On the strength of this small sample I would argue that blogging is an emerging academic practice, and a new genre of scholarly writing, which could become an important activity and skill for a professional academic. Academics will have to decide how much blogging to engage with alongside other publications or types of public engagement (like making presentations and giving lectures). We should expect to find academics dedicating time and effort to blogging and their blogs will be understood as a product of research and scholarship; accruing the usual rewards - external esteem and career advancement.

Quiggin in 2006 tried unsuccessfully to model the economic value of blogging (Quiggin in 2006), and a recent heated debate about earning from blogging (Penn and Zalasne, 2009 Sherky, 2009) has supported Quiggin that the economic value of blogging – to the blogger- is in the esteem it brings. For most academics writing has always only had esteem value, and like bloggers across the world, very few make any significant income from it. The esteem might not be just to the individual but to the institution where they

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

work. ‘Professor M’ argued that academic institutions ‘*should have some bloggers – [they should] engage in what is now a significant industry*’

This small sample of academic bloggers talked at length about the care with which they constructed their blog posts and how they thought about their audience when they wrote. They all had similar ideas about the size, shape and voice that worked best for blogging, which suggested that the rules for blogging as a genre can be deduced and applied. This supports some of the early writing by boyd (2006) who argued that people initially understood blogging through the metaphors of journalism and diary writing, however these were metaphors which reflected the fact that people did not know what possibilities blogging had in its own right. The activities of this sample of academic bloggers suggest that academic blogging is a particular genre within the wider medium of blogging. Other genres of blogging are now also being recognized serious texts. In April 2009 a blog called ‘Night Jack – an English Detective’<sup>iii</sup>, won £3,000 and the Orwell Prize for political writing, signaling that blogs are established well enough as a category to be eligible for literary prizes along with books and journalism. Such public acknowledgement will support the activity of academic blogging.

Blogging is not a genre where novices practice for writing eventually in traditional media. The most considered and successful bloggers in the sample were academics who had extensive experience with other forms of text production. This might change as young academics – such as ‘Dr D’- learn to produce blogs along side the other text

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

production skills they are learning, however, academia would do well to encourage some of its best academic writers to take up blogging to provide models for the rest.

It seems that using blogging as a medium for reflecting on, and sharing comments about the conditions of working life, is the most problematic kind of blogging for anyone including academics to engage with. It is the one most likely to bring negative repercussions onto the author and the one where the author feels most constrained about what they can write. The kind of academic blogging which seems to produce the greatest sense of subjective well being, and is best at enhancing professional reputation, is the blog of ideas. In this kind of blog authors engage in conversations with their own ideas and the ideas of their peers. Blogging is both a process where ideas are developed and expressed, but often in a concise and accessible form quite different from the traditional long, analytical, and discursive academic texts that are the products by which most academics are assessed. It has the potential for re-engaging academics in the activity of being public intellectuals.

*These themes suggest that academic blogging is a becoming a particular form of academic writing; a genre through which academics perform their scholarly identity, engage in knowledge production, and become public intellectuals, at least on the internet.*

( words 6,300)

## References

## Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

- Benton, M. (2006). Thoughts on Blogging by a Poorly Masked Academic. [Electronic Version]. *Reconstruction*, 6(4). (<http://reconstruction.eserver.org/064/benton.shtml> accessed 01.05.2009)
- Borgman, C. L. (2007). Scholarship in the Digital Age. Information, Infrastructure and the Internet. London, MIT Press.
- boyd, d. (2006). A Blogger's Blog: Exploring the Definition of a Medium [Electronic Version]. *Reconstruction*, 6.4 (<http://reconstruction.eserver.org/064/boyd.shtml> accessed 01.05.2009)
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (second ed.). New York, London,: Routledge.
- Ewins, R. (2005). Who are You? Weblogs and Academic Identity. *E-Learning*, 2(4), 368-377.
- Farmer, J. (2006). Blogging to Basics: How Blogs are Bringing Online Education Back from the Brink. In A. Bruns & J. Jacobs (Eds.), *Uses of Blogs* (pp. 91-103). New York: Peter Lang.
- Gergan, K. J. (2000). The Saturated Self. In A. Branaman (Ed.), *Self and society* (pp. 265-281). London: Blackwell.
- Giddens, A. (1994) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press.
- Gregg, M (2006) Feeling Ordinary: Blogging as Conversational Scholarship. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 20 (2) 147-160

Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

Gregg, M ( 2009) Banal Bohemia: Blogging from the Ivory Tower Hotdesk, *Convergence. The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. 15(4)

Hyland, K. (2002). Options of identity in academic writing. *ELT Journal Volume 56/4* October 2002, 56(4), 351-358.

Ivanic, R. (1998). *Writing and Identity. The discorsal construction of identity in academic writing*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Kerawalla, L., Minocha, S., Kirkup, G., & Conole, G (2009). An empirically grounded framework to guide blogging in higher education. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 25(1), 31-42.

Kerawalla, L., Minocha, S., Kirkup, G., & Conole, G. (2008). Characterising the different blogging behaviours of students on an online distance learning course. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 33(1), 21-33.

Ko, H.-C. and F.-Y. Kuo (2009). "Can Blogging Enhance Subjective Well-Being Through Self-Disclosure?" *CyberPsychology & Behavior* **12**(1): 75-79.

Lenhart A and Fox S (2009) Twitterpated: Mobile Americans Increasingly Take to Tweeting, Pew Research Centre 12.04.2009 (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1117/twitter-tweet-users-demographics>, accessed 01.05.2009)

Lovink, G. (2008). Zero Comments. Blogging and Critical internet culture. London, Routledge.



Blogging: Academic identity and academic practice

McCullagh, K (2009) Blogging: self presentation and privacy. *Information and Communications Technology Law*, 17 (1) 3-23

Penn, M., and Zelesne K., (2009) America's Newest Profession: Bloggers for Hire' Wall Street Journal 21.04.2009  
(<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124026415808636575.html>, accessed 01.05.2009)

Saper, C. (2006). Blogademia. [Electronic Version]. *Reconstruction*, 6(4), 1-15.  
(<http://reconstruction.eserver.org/064/saper.shtml> accessed 01.05.2009)

Scoble, R., & Israel, S. (2006). *Naked Conversations. How blogs are changing the way businesses talk with customers*. Hoboken, new Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.

Shirky C., (2009) Clay Shirky Debunks the WSJ's "Bloggers for Hire" Feature BoingBoing 30.04.2009 ( <http://www.boingboing.net/2009/04/30/clay-shirky-debunks.html> accessed 01.05.2009)

Shirky, C. (2003). "Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality." Retrieved 02.05.2009, from [http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw\\_weblog.html](http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html).

Walker, J. (2006). Blogging from Inside the Ivory Tower In A. Bruns & J. Jacobs (Eds.), *Uses of Blogs* (pp. 127-138). New York: Peter Lang.

Ward, M. ( 2006 ) Thoughts on blogging as an ethnographic tool. *In Proceedings of the 23rd annual ascilite conference: Who's learning? Whose technology?* Sydney Australia

---

<sup>i</sup> I work in the Open University (UK). I have deliberately chosen not to put the name of the institution in the text of the paper, not because I am attempting to anonymized the institution, but because I do not want the paper to be read as a case study of academic blogging in a particular institution.

<sup>ii</sup> A 'tweet' if the name of a short posting made to 'Twitter'. Twitter is a social networking application, very popular at the time of writing. It is also described as mico-blogging, because users can send and receive short messages of up to 140 characters to others who have subscribed to you Twitter feed. My entire sample knew about Twitter, only two were users of it, and no one at the time of writing expected to replace their blogging with Twitter.

<sup>iii</sup> Night Jack An English Detective can be read at : <http://nightjack.wordpress.com/>