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Driven to abstraction: doctoral supervision and writing pedagogies

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The writing of academic abstracts is more than a tiresome necessity of scholarly life. It is a practice that goes beyond genre and technique to questions of writing and identity. In this article we deconstruct a series of abstracts from a variety of refereed journals to 'read' for the representation of data, argument, methodology and significance. We describe one strategy for writing abstracts, developed as part of a long-term project on postgraduate writing pedagogies. We propose that the art of writing abstracts is neglected in the academy, is given scant attention by journal editors, and has produced a motley and often bland array of conventions and genres. We suggest that abstract art should be an important aspect of supervision if graduate students and novice researchers are to stake a claim in the academy.

Introduction

Like many doctoral supervisors, we have noticed that some of our students are not only reluctant writers, but also express a range of other emotions associated with the requirement to write—agitation, resentment, despair and fear. Often they engage in counter-productive delaying tactics, which can jeopardize their work, and sometimes their capacity to complete their projects and programs.

A pivotal study by Torrance & Thomas (1994) noted that students who delay completion or fail to complete their dissertation, often do so because of writing-related issues. Students often see a 'strict demarcation between collecting data, or doing research, and the writing of this material as a dissertation' (Torrance & Thomas, 1994, p. 107), and it is this perception that often produces problems for student writers. Other research findings about the connections between writing and academic 'success' (e.g. Leibowitz & Goodman, 1997; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000; Lillis, 2001; Lillis & Turner, 2001) also suggest we need to address the writing issues that actually prevent students from developing productive research writing practices (cf. Mullen, 2001)

We join with scholars of academic writing, such as Woolcott (2001), who counsel qualitative research students to see writing as an integral part of the research agenda, rather than something that occurs at the end. In the doctoral writing pedagogy we

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have been developing (B. Kamler & P. Thomson, in preparation) we encourage our students to write early and all through the period of candidature. We suggest that they write outside of the dissertation structure in order to work on segments of literature, method and data produced in field work. Such writing, be it conference papers or journal articles, helps in the process of clarifying argument, as well as doing important reputation work. This writing, however, is not easy.

In this article, we consider the complexity of doctoral research/writing by focusing on the case of writing an abstract. Why abstracts? The abstract is a taken for granted academic practice which, it seems, academics are just expected to know how to produce. We will show, however, that far from being a tiresome necessity of academic life, the abstract is a small, but rich site for pedagogic work. We examine the guidelines given to prospective journal writers, and then undertake two analyses of journal abstracts in order to identify textual features and characteristics of the abstract genre. We then offer one strategy for assisting doctoral students to master the art of the abstract. We demonstrate via our analysis, that writing an abstract, like all research writing, involves both text work and identity work.

Research writing as social practice

Our work here on abstract writing is part of a larger project of mapping a doctoral writing pedagogy. We take the view, and endeavour to communicate to our students, that writing is researching. Writing is not incidental to research, it is not peripheral, it is not just 'writing up' (Kamler & Thomson, 2001) what you 'find' after the research is complete. It is so central to the research process that we can conceive of doctoral research *as* writing (Lee, 1998).

Like Richardson (1994) we think it is useful for students to think of research writing as a 'method of inquiry':

> Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing'—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable. (Richardson, 1994, p. 516)

We also encourage our students to conceptualize doctoral writing as a social practice. In doing so, we distinguish our work from skills-orientated approaches, which focus on how to 'fix' problems with student learning by emphasizing the surface features of language, particularly grammar and spelling (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158). Our social practice approach is closely aligned with the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984; Barton, 1994; Baynham, 1995) and a growing body of literature on undergraduate academic literacies (e.g. Lea, 1994; Street, 1995; Lea & Street, 1998; Lea & Stierer, 2001), which examines literacy, identities and the institutions where literacy takes place, as constituted in, and as sites of discourse and power.

From this perspective, we are interested in the processes through which doctoral students learn to write and become authorised writers within particular scholarly and

institutional communities. Bizzell (1992) and Bartholomae's (1985) older work on discourse communities is useful here to construe doctoral writers as novices, whose task it is to learn new literacies and new ways with words as they enter the discursive practices of scholarly communities. This involves learning sophisticated sets of writing practices with sets of conventions and textual characteristics. However, like Lee, we think much advice offered to doctoral students glosses over the 'profoundly textual nature of research' (Lee, 1998) and pays too little attention to the kinds of persons formed through research writing. We remedy that tendency here by considering abstract writing as both text work and identity work (Kamler, 2001), as a bid for finding an authoritative speaking position, and asserting what one knows in a field of expert and interested others.

Abstract writing as text work and identity work

Like most academic writing, abstract writing is strongly tied to the formation and negotiation of 'the scholar'. Abstract writers are not only seducing others to buy their wares and/or bidding for inclusion in conferences and publications, they are also positioning themselves to be seen as legitimate knowers within particular scholarly communities. Scholarly writers locate themselves by virtue of the literatures noted, the theorizations mobilized and the places they name as ontological/ epistemological homes (Kamler & Thomson, 2001). However, this text work is not neutral; it is shaped by the genres and power relations of the academy, which in turn shape 'academics' and how they are read by others.

We have become aware of the complexity at stake by witnessing many doctoral, and early career researchers struggle to access the journal, conference and other discourse communities of the academy. Initially, we were surprised at how difficult many of our postgraduate students found writing abstracts, but we now know this is not uncommon. It is, in fact, our observations of widespread difficulties in abstract writing that cause us to ask a number of questions about what is going on at the site of this textual construction.

The difficulty emerges, we argue, primarily because of the identity work involved. According to Stuart Hall (1996, pp. 5–6) 'identity' is 'the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to "interpellate", or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be spoken'. Using Hall's definition, we suggest that our postgraduate students are not yet sutured into the academy. Spoken as 'early career', or as 'candidates', they are not yet positioned as, and do not yet see themselves as fully fledged academics.

Struggling to write an abstract, then, may have less to do with writing competence than with being accomplished in taking up a deferential academic speaking position. Doctoral students and graduates are skilled in summarizing and locating their research. Presumably, they know how to argue, because a thesis is, after all, an argument that has been carefully made and substantiated across 200 plus pages of

crafted text. However, doctoral writers are also encouraged to write in a cautious manner that will be successfully assessed by examiners. Through years of writing, they are duly indoctrinated into the careful, highly-substantiated thesis genre.

The identity work accomplished through thesis writing, we argue, can shape tentative and sometimes highly anxious scholar identities. Publishing out of their PhDs presents a new set of 'identification' challenges as they negotiate a place for themselves in the wider academic community. To meet these challenges we have been developing PhD writing and publication pedagogies, which incorporate a more explicit sense of the text work required to construct, *inter alia*, a successful abstract. In the remainder of this article we report on our textual explorations of the abstract genre, describing the kinds of patterns we found and how we went about finding them. We then briefly consider a few strategies we use to support writers in both the text work and identity work involved in learning the 'secret practices' of abstract writing.

Reading across abstracts: analysis 1

To make sense of abstract writing and demystify the genre for postgraduate students, we attempted two kinds of analysis. The first aimed for breadth and a sense of broad patterning in the genre; the second aimed for depth and closer attention to language features and conventions. In our first analysis, we surveyed a selection of different educational journals to see if they might yield some commonalities of form.

We focused on the first issue of 10 journals published in 2001, produced by five different and large publishing companies, Lawrence Erlbaum, Sage, Blackwell, Kluwer and Taylor & Francis, covering a range of fields. In addition, we also looked at one on-line journal whose abstracts we knew to be different from the norm. In all, we examined 70 abstracts which came from the following journals:

Journal of Contemporary Psychology	(8 articles)
Journal of Art and Design	(11 articles)
Journal of Early Childhood Literacy	(4 articles)
Journal of Education and Work	(7 articles)
Journal of Curriculum Studies	(6 articles)
Journal of Philosophy of Education	(11 articles)
Journal of Moral Education	(5 articles)
Journal of Education Policy	(5 articles)
Journal of Youth Studies	(6 articles)
Journal of Phonetics	(4 articles)
Harvard Educational Review	(3 articles)

We initiated our first pass through the abstract data by looking at the instructions given as advice to authors. What help, we wondered, was offered to academics and postgraduates to guide their composition? The answer was very little, as is evident from this selection.

> *Harvard Educational Review:* Authors must submit three copies of the manuscript, including a one-page abstract.
>
> *Journal of Curriculum Studies:* Abstracts are required for all papers submitted and should precede the text of a paper. The length should be approximately 150 words.
>
> *Journal of Education and Work:* An abstract of 100–150 words should be included
>
> *Journal of Youth Studies:* Each article should be accompanied by an abstract/summary[1] of 100–150 words on a separate sheet.
>
> *Journal of Philosophy of Education*[2]: Contributors should include on a separate sheet a summary of 100 words or less, containing key words and phrases that could be used to index the article.
>
> *Journal of Contemporary Psychology:* The abstract must be a single paragraph that summarizes the main findings of the paper in less than 150 words. After the abstract a list of up to 10 key words that will be useful for indexing or searching should be included.

This consistent lack of guidance for writers concerned us, as it constructs the writing of abstracts as primarily a matter of word length, blind reviewing and keywords. To make explicit to ourselves and our students the kind of genre conventions that might be operating, we constructed the following rubric for reading the seventy abstracts. Our aim was to identify both general patterns and/or those associated with particular disciplines.

The first line of each abstract

We wanted to get an impression of whether the research was contextualized in some way at the outset and whether the writers had worked for some kind of attention grabbing opener.

Whether the abstract was a summary report, an argument or some kind of blend

We were mindful that abstracts are often described as succinct summaries of the research, that is, as descriptive pieces. We wondered how accurate or appropriate this definition was.

The structure of the abstract

We looked for what, who and how and hypothesis, method and findings. We hoped to get a sense of what writers thought needed to go into an abstract and how they ordered this material.

The epistemological position

We were looking to see if there was any connection between the type of research and format and the epistemological tradition.

The representation of the researcher

We wondered whether there were any patterns of discipline and/or epistemology about how the researcher marked their presence or absence in the abstract (e.g. through use of first or third person pronouns or the use of passive verbs).

We identified a number discipline-specific patterns from this first analysis, although not as many as we had expected. Articles in the *Journal of Contemporary Psychology* were, with only one exception, in the experimental tradition. They worked from what appeared to be a positivist epistemology, speaking of findings as if they were truths, as in the following statement, '*Both argument and generalisation were significantly more effective for stating a thesis statement*' (conclusion from Friend, 2001). The abstracts were uniformly summary reports which discussed what, how and findings, and were written in third person. Only two abstracts were contextualized in any way—one was located in a particular trajectory in the field, and the other, an evaluative review of literature, referred to a school and the need for the research. All other nine abstracts operated in a kind of placeless, timeless vacuum. The same pattern was apparent in the *Journal of Phonetics*, which also reported on experiments.

In contrast, and hardly surprisingly, given the focus of the journal, the *Journal of Education Policy* abstracts were highly contextualized in place, time and policy trends. Readers would be left in no doubt by openers such as, '*The topic of religion in public schools has generated interest in several countries in recent years*' (first sentence, Taylor, 2001). The abstracts were uniformly arguments, although in the lead article the abstract spent so much time setting the scene that there was only a concluding sentence devoted to the actual point the writers wanted to make. All the articles were written from a critical, feminist or post-structural position, or some combination thereof. The researcher was mostly absent in these abstracts, although there was one reference to a collective of authors and another to a generic we-who-must-be-concerned.

The *Journal of Philosophy of Education* abstracts also showed a distinctive pattern. Without exception, the abstracts either began with a proposition and an argument, or with an assertion of an argument, which was then elaborated, as in '*I argue that Hannah Arendt's analysis of modern society illuminates one aspect of prevailing educational discourse …*' (first sentence of Masschelein, 2001). The researcher was present in six of the 11 abstracts as '*I argue, I address*', and '*I show*'. All of the articles were written in critical or hermeneutic traditions, and one used language associated with post-structuralism.

The commonalities in each of these cases suggest both disciplinary coherence and editorial policy. Readers of these journals could perhaps be expected to accept these writerly and epistemological stances. There was, however, little discernable pattern in our other six journals. The abstracts were predominantly arguments with a minority of summary reports and descriptions. The majority of the abstracts were written in the third person, and not one was what we would describe as a riveting read! There was, however, one other commonality in the way the abstracts began.

The most common first sentence construction used in several of the journals was:

'*This paper aims to*' or '*The purpose of this article is to ...*' or '*Using this method or data base, this article will ...*' or '*This study aims to ...*', or '*This paper outlines ...*', or '*This paper defines and discusses ...*' or '*This article reports ...*'. There were 15 such instances of this construction. Of these, six were arguments, and nine were summary reports. There were also two abstracts that began '*This article is ...*' and then referred to theoretical debate and one which referred to a material employment situation. We think that these latter two are different from those abstracts that begin by stating what the article will accomplish and/or its point. The benefit of this aim/purpose approach is that the reader knows at the outset what to expect and sometimes why the writers think it is important. However, knowing what you are going to get is not necessarily an enticement to read further. Other ways of beginning an abstract might not only be more attention getting, but might more effectively contextualize the research at the same time.

Reading abstracts closely: analysis 2

In our second analysis, we selected four educational research journals published by research organisations across three countries: *Australian Educational Researcher* (Australia), *Educational Researcher* and the *American Educational Research Journal* (US) and the *British Educational Research Journal* (UK). Our aim was to read for depth, rather than breadth, and identify approaches used in journals specifically dedicated to educational research. We also wanted to read across cultures and communities of educational research practice to see what kind (if any) patterning occurred. To make our sample manageable, we selected only volumes published in 2001, choosing a minimum of two issues from each. There were a total of 51 abstracts as follows:

Australian Educational Researcher, vol 28 (issues 1–3)	(18 articles)
Educational Researcher, vol 30 (issues 1–4, 6, 7 and 9)	(7 articles)
American Educational Research Journal vol 38 (issues 1 and 4)	(13 articles)
British Educational Research Journal vol 27 (issues 2 and 4)	(13 articles)

Our rubric for reading the 51 abstracts shared common ground with that used for our wider scoping, namely:

- *the first line of each abstract*;
- *whether the abstract was a summary report or an argument or some kind of blend*;
- *how the researcher was represented in the text*;
- *how the research was located in wider debates, issues, research.*

Additionally, we looked more closely at the language used and the strategies for locating the research and asserting authority. At a linguistic level, we were interested in verbs—in the use of active versus passive voice, and the occurrence or absence of the verb *argue* or its equivalent. We were interested in attitudinal or evaluative items, in particular, how an abstract presented its own contribution in relation to other research, issues, debates. By looking in this finer grained way we wanted to see how writers stressed (or did not stress) the significance of the research being reported.

We turn now to a number of patterns that emerged from this analysis, in particular the way researchers represented themselves and located their work.

The presence/absence of the researcher

In the majority of abstracts, we found that the researcher as an identified person (I) or persons (we) was absent. Out of 51 abstracts, five used *I*, nine used *we* and the rest used neither. Most frequently used were phrases such as '*this paper*', '*this article*', '*this study*', '*this research*'. This syntax, also seen in our earlier analysis, is one where agency is attributed to the research (article, paper), rather than to the researcher. For example, in the following abstract *from the British Educational Research Journal* (Harris, 2001) it is '*the article*' that carries out all the action: it '*focuses*', '*highlights*' and '*concludes*'.

> *This article focuses* on secondary school departments and argues that the current approaches to school improvement do not adequately reflect or incorporate the department level. Drawing upon empirical evidence from two evaluative studies, *the article highlights* the processes that contribute to improved departmental performance and subsequently, to school and classroom improvement. *The article concludes* by suggesting that the department is an important 'missing link' in school improvement theory and practice.

Another pattern used in the abstracts for keeping the focus on the research, rather than the researcher, involved the use of passive verb forms, illustrated in this abstract from the *British Educational Research Journal* (Hargreaves, 2001):

> A new theory of school effectiveness and improvement *is outlined*, based on the master concepts of intellectual capital, social capital and leverage, linked with the conventional concept of institutional outputs. Each master concept *is defined* in terms of two subsidiary concepts. Twelve specifically educational concepts *are set* within this framework to provide the theory. It *is proposed* that, through a simplified model, the range and fertility of the theory *can be exemplified and tested* in three specific cases-the changing nature of school effectiveness and improvement in knowledge economies, citizenship education and teacher effectiveness.

Here, the researcher is entirely absent so that the scholarly actions have no source; that is, a theory *is outlined* or a concept *is defined*, but by no-one in particular. While this pattern was more frequently found in the British journal than in the American or Australian counterparts, such syntactic differences cannot be attributed to cultural differences based on such a small sample. We did, however note one cultural similarity across all four journals: the researcher was rarely represented by the pronoun '*I*'. It is instructive to look at one exception in our sample, from the *Australian Journal of Educational Research* (Schultz, 2001) to tease out possible effects of making the researcher self too prominent:

> Participatory research methods are often assumed to alter the roles, relationships and responsibilities of researchers and participants in research projects reframing research as collaborative inquiry. In *my own* research on urban schooling, whenever possible, *I* have attempted to craft research projects with and for the participants in the project, rather than conducting research on them. For instance, in order to document urban

> adolescents' perspectives on their schooling, *I* asked high school students to join research projects as co-researchers. *I* learned that the core principles of participatory research become complicated and, at times, problematic when put into practice with adolescents. In this article, *I* describe three of the collaborative relationships *I* developed with high school students in a single research project. *I* use this work with adolescents to call for the reconsideration of conventional notions of collaboration, participation, action and representation in participatory research.

While this abstract makes clear what the researcher has done ('I have attempted', *'I asked', 'I learned', 'I describe', 'I developed', 'I use'*), it also narrows the possible significance of that scholarly work. The focus on self can be read as excessive self-promotion which ignores previous research. While reference to its own contribution is modest linguistically ('*call for the reconsideration of conventional notions of*...') the abstract constructs a world where this research is the only or major effort at collaboration, possibly an unintended consequence of the over-used first person pronoun *I*.

Location, location, location

Another pattern we found across the educational journals was a greater tendency for writers of the Australian and British abstracts to situate their research by nation in the first sentence. In these examples from the *Australian Educational Researcher*, for example, Australia is mentioned as the site of research:

> This paper investigates the ways in which corporate ideas are impacting on *Australian* education with a particular emphasis on secondary schools (Meadmore & McWilliam, 2001, p. 31)

> The education systems in the States and territories of *Australia* are analysed using age by grade (Year) tables produced by the *Australian* Bureau of Statistics from the 1 July returns from government and non-government schools (McDonald, 2001, p. 81)

In the following examples from the *British Educational Research Journal*, the source of data is fore-grounded as emanating from education systems or institutions in England and Wales:

> The article reviews ways in which performance data are currently used within the *England and Wales* education system. (Goldstein, 2001, p. 432)

> The analysis demonstrates that the average A/AS level results secured by *English* institutions from year to year are very stable. (Gray *et al.*, 2001, p. 391)

Such geographical naming occurred less frequently in the sample of American journals analysed, where there were only two instances. When this naming did occur, as in the following examples from the *Educational Researcher* and the *American Educational Researcher*, it is in relation to research on race rather than to the US as a site or specific location of research.

> The race question that appears perhaps most in *American* achievement talk ('how and why do different "race groups" achieve differently') is also our most often deleted race question, as it provokes our most difficult explanations. (Pollak, 2001)

> Researchers depict *African American* Teachers in the South during segregation alternately as either victims of oppressive circumstances or as caring role models. (Walker, 2001, p. 751)

That educational researchers outside the US locate themselves in this way may be a representation of centre-periphery knowledge production. For example, one of us has been told by educational publishers to make sure that half of the contributors to an edited collection are from the home country of the publisher (US and UK). Whether this affects the way that writers construct their abstracts is not clear and is a matter for further investigation. However, it may also be that research training and writing conventions in specific countries, such as Australia, suggest that specification of material location is an important element of any research exegesis.

We were also interested in other kinds of locational work that go on in abstracts, particularly in first lines. Consider, for example, these opening sentences from the *Educational Researcher*:

> What could it mean for educators within the 'core disciplines' to teach in ways that challenge multiple forms of oppression? (Willinsky, 2001, p. 3)

> The National Research Council seeks to obtain considerable federal funding for its proposal to improve student learning through its Strategic Education Research Program. (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 5)

The first opener invites readers to engage in a conversation by providing an answer. It also offers the highly contentious notion 'multiple forms of oppression', which may provoke a critical reading stance. What does this writer mean by this term? Will we agree with it? The second opener offers a set of phrases that explain little and beg for more detail. What is the Strategic Education Research Program? What student learning might be said to improve because of it? How much is 'considerable federal funding' and how might we get some of it?

While not examples of the best opening lines imaginable, both are relatively engaging. As well, they do accomplish useful location work, positioning the article and its writer(s) within a field, a debate, a dilemma, a policy shift. Perhaps, not surprisingly, most of these locational first liners happened in the *Educational Researcher*, where the remit to authors is to write articles of broad educational and social significance for a wide audience.

We ask ourselves—given that researchers do not work alone and are part of a larger global research community where conversations and debates within and across disciplines and fields is the norm—shouldn't *all* researchers be doing this locating work, not just those on the margins or those in policy contexts? We wonder if it might not be a good idea for postgraduate students to be encouraged to adopt this kind of approach to the abstract, rather than use *this paper* and *this article* as an opening line.

We were interested to find that Educati*on*-line, an English data base of predominantly conference papers, gives more detailed abstract guidance that highlights this very point (see http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/abstracts.html). Taken from a British Educational Research Association publication (Bassey, 1995), the online advice says 'because of the international nature of research it is worth making clear in what

country the research took place'. The advice goes on to say that the abstract should specify the claim to knowledge that the writers are making, should indicate the boundaries of space and time within which the enquiry occurred, and hint at the method of enquiry. We were encouraged to read that the abstract is not a 'trailer' or an 'introduction', and that 'both the abstract and the paper should make sense without the other'. This advice, we think, is beginning to head towards some of the ideas that might underpin a pedagogy for artful abstracts.

The pedagogy/ies of abstract writing

Both abstract analyses suggest that journal editors appear to offer little assistance in writing interesting and informative abstracts. If our samples of journals are anything to go by, simply following dominant textual practices is unlikely to be a helpful strategy for postgraduate students, since the most common types of abstracts often have limp opening sentences, do little to locate the research in place, field or times, and frequently substitute summary and description with argument. We did find abstracts that piqued our curiosity, that gave us information about the terrain to be covered by the article and provided us with the concise argument that would be made. This perhaps would not matter to anyone, were we not now in a time when on-line journals proliferate and title and key word searches often lead to abstracts before full text articles. If research is to be read, then what is in the abstract counts more than ever before.

However, our concern here is not with abstracts in general. Rather, we suggest that if graduate and novice researchers experience difficulties because of the identity work required in scholarly writing, then working with them on a 'tiny text' may well help. Working on how to take a stand, speak authoritatively, state an argument and make a claim, might be accomplished more effectively through writing an abstract, than through writing a much larger text. Our hunch is that if identity can first be writ small, then it may be easier later to write it large. We are still working on this proposition as we experiment with ways of assisting our students to write abstracts.

We now discuss briefly one strategy we have been developing and researching to provide our doctoral students with more guidance in writing. We write this as a practitioner researcher narrative, grounded in the investigations we have outlined.

Abstract questions

Two years ago, at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, we ran a half day workshop for doctoral candidates and early career researchers on writing for publication. We initially expected around 30 participants and planned accordingly. However, around 120 people enrolled and we found ourselves not with a personalized workshop, but a difficult version of mass pedagogy. In order to deliver on our promise of doing something practical, we eventually decided to work on a set of questions that could be used by pairs of participants to guide conversation and writing of abstracts. Our goal was that everyone would leave

the workshop with a working draft of an abstract for an article they could/should write.

We began the workshop by establishing writing pairs, who shared information about their individual research projects. With some audience participation, we then developed a set of genre questions to be asked of abstracts (see below). We utilized this heuristic to consider and critically read a series of published abstracts, which we projected onto a screen. We then asked each pair to use the heuristic as a way to begin to consider what needed to be included in their own abstracts.

Genre

- What's the research problem being addressed?
- How do I locate the significance of my work?
- What conversation am I in? Where am I standing to research this problem?
- What do I offer as an alternative to existing research?
- What is my argument?

We then paused the pair conversations to consider questions of identity and authority. We developed a further set of questions which guided further paired conversations. The questions listed below are based on those developed in the workshop, but have been refined through further small group and individual work with our own doctoral students.

Representation

- How do I represent myself as researcher? (I, we, passive, the paper)
- How much reference do I make to the research method/methodology and in what way?
- How much reference do I make to the doctoral or masters thesis?
- Given that researchers do not work alone and are part of a larger global research community, what should I say about the location of my research

What happened, of course, during the collaborative construction of these abstracts was a great deal of conversation. We observed several drafts of each abstract being written and we overheard many conversations about authority and identity, as well as other writerly and scholarly matters. Conversations swung from the choice of particular kinds of adjectives and adverbs, to discussions of the nature of the claims being made, to questions of policy and related research. Dialogue is central to this kind of pedagogical text and identity work. It is in the talk and movement from one draft to another that the movement to being 'author-ized' as a knower, rather than a learner, occurs.

Our final move in the workshop, and also in subsequent work with our own students, was to focus on what we call the 'So What' question. We asked neophyte researchers to consider why anyone should read their work. We asked, 'Given that there is a plethora of possible research available in publication, why read this and not something else?' Here, we go not only to the question of authority, but also to the

notion that research writing is an invitation to a public conversation about things that matter. In asking doctoral candidates to consider the importance of their work, we challenge them to take up a speaking position within the academy, to write, if not with confidence, at least with certainty that what they have to contribute is important.

In conclusion

Journals such as *Teaching in Higher Education* are evidence that postgraduate and doctoral teaching are no less deserving or requiring of robust engagement and interrogation, than teaching in schools. Supervision, while still under-theorized (Green & Lee, 1995), is increasingly an object of critical inquiry, rather than a naturalized and privatised transmission of expertise between masters and apprentices. Foci as diverse as journal writing (Mannion, 2001), staff development programs for supervisors (Grant & Graham, 1999), the use of first person narratives in research texts (Hyland, 2002), and research into the experiences of supervisors and supervisees (Delamont *et al.*, 1998) now appear routinely in scholarly publications. We see our work on postgraduate writing pedagogy as contributing to the wider scholarship on supervision.

We have suggested in this paper that the art of writing abstracts is neglected in the academy, is given scant attention by journal editors and has produced a motley and often bland array of conventions and genres. We have also argued that there is benefit in being more systematic about supporting postgraduate and newly-qualified researchers in writing abstracts.

While we do have ideas about what is helpful in scaffolding conversations and workshops that support abstract writing, this is only a small beginning in thinking about the myriad of complex writing practices associated with research. We emphasize that we are talking about writing practices here and not just skills, and that advice and tips will not suffice as the genre we offer postgraduate students.

We fear that until the notion of writing as integral to academic work is taken seriously, it will stay on the margins of the practices of supervision. We therefore continue to ask aloud: what is the pedagogy we need to develop to teach these writing practices? How will we differentiate the different kinds of writing that are involved in what we call research writing? We also suggest that unless the identity work involved in writing academic texts is acknowledged, then doctoral students will continue to find the construction of academic texts much harder work than it needs to be.

Notes

1. Two of the six articles in our issue were summaries. The other four were arguments.
2. This is particularly interesting given that all but one of the abstracts in the journal we read were arguments not simply summaries.

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