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# Policing the Boundaries:

# The Writing, Representation and Regulation of Criminology

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SUMMARY

Writing has a central role in UK higher education as a technology for, and signifier of,
the learning, teaching and assessment of students. The nature and quality of student
writing has also become an important issue outside the academy, particularly in the
context of a globalised neo-liberal knowledge economy discourse which emphasises
the importance of transferable and employability skills. Although there is a
considerable body of research relating to student writing, the work that I undertook
for earlier professional doctorate assignments suggested that the role of academic
staff in regulating student writing was under-researched and under-theorised. The
research carried out for this thesis sought to address this gap in knowledge by
focussing on two central questions. Firstly, what role do academic staff play in
regulating student writing? Secondly, how is this role shaped by the specific
departmental, disciplinary and institutional contexts in which they are located?

The research was undertaken in a criminology department in a post-1992 university in
the UK. It was positioned in an academic literacies framework which conceptualises
writing as a social practice, and drew on linguistic ethnographic methodologies to
explore the written feedback that staff give on student writing. The written feedback
encounter is where staff and student expectations about academic writing practices
intersect, and is therefore a telling site for the study of educational discourses relating
to knowledge and how it is represented. Data were collected from three main sources:
written feedback and comments given by academic staff on 120 pieces of student
work; 18 interviews with staff about academic writing; and institutional policies and
procedures relating to marking, assessment and feedback. Employing a range of
theoretical perspectives, including those informed by feminist and poststructuralist
analysis, these texts were analysed to explore the relationship between institutional
discourses, pedagogical practices and identity construction.

My research showed that there was a considerable disjuncture between the institutional discourses which governed marking, assessment and feedback and the actual feedback practices of staff. Despite the strong scientific and positivist discourse that pervaded institutional documentation on assessment and feedback, some staff drew on a range of alternative pedagogical discourses and engaged in assessment practices which were more subjective and localised in nature. This gap between the institutional discourse and the situated literacy practices was mediated to some extent by the assessment coversheet and marking procedures which worked to provide an appearance of consistency and agreement to external audiences. This promoted a technical rational approach to feedback which obscured the epistemological and gatekeeping functions of feedback.

The thesis concludes that the effective theorisation and teaching of student writing rests on an understanding of how academic staff construct and police the boundaries of appropriate knowledge in their discipline. This approach draws on existing academic literacies theories but argues for a more holistic model which understands academic writing as co-constructed through the practices of both students who produce the written work and the academic staff who mark it.

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**Table of Contents**

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

## 1.1    Purpose and Aims

Writing is a central feature of academic life. It is a signifier that learning has happened, that research has been undertaken and that quality has been assured. For most students in UK higher education, writing tasks are a central mechanism through which knowledge and understanding are assessed and on which judgements about performance are made. For academic staff too, research and the production of knowledge are 'profoundly textual' (A. Lee, 1998, p.124) and written outputs have a significant impact on the nature and trajectory of their careers. At the wider institutional level, the key activities of research, teaching and administration are regulated through, and demonstrated by, written texts. Writing can therefore be seen as a dominant technology in the process of knowledge construction and production in the academy and a mechanism through which knowledge is commodified and credentialised.

There is a growing body of research which has explored writing and other literacy practices within higher education. Much of it has focussed on undergraduate student writing  (Ivanic, 1998; Jones, Turner, & Street, 1999; Lea & Stierer, 2000; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1999), although work has also been done on postgraduate and doctoral writing  (Kamler & Thomson, 2006; Stierer, 1997). However, in my Critical Analytic Study (CAS), I argued that insufficient attention has been paid to the writing practices of academic staff or to the influence that they have in relation to student writing (Creaton, 2007). Yet academics play a crucial role in framing appropriate knowledge and how it should be represented:  in the criteria that they set for assignments, in their guidance on how students should write and present their work for assessment, and in the feedback that they give on submitted work. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationship between academic staff and student writing, by focussing on two central research questions. Firstly, what role do academics play in regulating student writing? Secondly, how is this role shaped by the specific departmental, disciplinary and institutional contexts in which they are located?

The thesis explores these questions through focussing on a specific discursive encounter between staff and students: the written feedback that academic staff give to students on their written work. Bailey and Garner (2010, p.188) note that feedback is at the 'interface between teachers' pedagogical goals; students' learning needs; and institutional and governmental education policies...'. The feedback encounter can therefore be seen as a telling site in the study of writing practices, because of its location at the intersection between student and staff expectations about what constitutes acceptable academic writing. It can also be considered as a 'fruitful epistemological site' (Sunderland, 2004, p.73) for the study of the educational discourses which staff engage with in making and justifying their responses to student writing.

Furthermore, this encounter is mediated almost entirely through text. In some cases, written feedback is supported by oral feedback, by generic written group feedback or by follow-up work with a tutor. However, for most students, particularly those studying at a distance, feedback remains a written encounter, rarely supplemented by other forms of interaction (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002; Hounsell, 1987). This trend has been exacerbated by the massification of higher education in the UK. At 45%, 2008/9 higher education initial participation rates (National Statistics, 2010) are just below the threshold of 50% which Trow (1973, 2005) identified as constituting a universal system of higher education. The opportunities available to students in elite forms of higher education to gradually acquire academic writing practices through implicit processes of induction, orientation and acculturation are considerably reduced in universal systems as class sizes increase and contact hours fall. For students in these systems, the written feedback that they receive on their work is the primary way in which information about expectations, norms and conventions are communicated and through which students come to understand what constitutes appropriate knowledge in the discipline and how it should be represented.

Feedback on student work is acknowledged to be crucially important, not just in the development of student writing practices, but in terms of overall learning and performance. Meta-analyses have suggested that feedback is potentially the largest

single factor in enhancing student achievement (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and Black and Wiliam's (1998) review of the research literature provided persuasive evidence that formative assessment could raise standards. In the higher education context too, feedback is considered to be crucial to student learning. Ramsden (2003, p.187), for example, suggests that it is 'impossible to overstate the role of effective comments on students' progress in any discussion of effective teaching and assessment' and Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell, and Litjens (2008, p.55) describe feedback as an 'indispensable part of an effective teaching–learning environment in higher education.'

Despite the acknowledgement of the importance of feedback in higher education, there is very little research which analyses the written feedback given on student work in any systematic way (Hounsell, 1987; Hounsell, et al., 2008), and the work that has been done in this field focuses mainly on the student experience of feedback. Research that has concentrated on the staff perspective suggests that the nature, quality and consistency of feedback varies significantly (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Hounsell, et al., 2008), that staff hold very different perceptions about the functions of feedback (MacLellan, 2001) and that staff experience tensions between the grading and learning functions of feedback (Yorke, 2002). Read, Francis and Robson (2001, 2004, 2005) take a social constructivist approach, suggesting that feedback is inextricably linked to the assessor's subjective positioning and shaped through influences such as gender, class and subject discipline. However, despite gendered discourses being evident in the different ways that male and female markers talked about marking and feedback, they found that these were not reflected in the samples of feedback that they analysed. Bailey and Garner (2010, p.133) conclude that 'there remains an important gap in research into assessment and pedagogical practice in the contemporary context and conditions of higher education regarding the teacher experience.'

In seeking to answer my research questions, I have drawn on the academic literacies approach (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Street, 2004) for the theoretical orientation of the research, and on linguistic ethnography as the methodological framework. Both academic literacies and linguistic ethnography are primarily post-positivist theoretical

and methodological frameworks which are informed by poststructuralist understandings of discourse, power and identity. They conceptualise language as constitutive of social practice and embedded in contested disciplinary, departmental and institutional relations. Using these frameworks, I explore key aspects of lecturers' discursive practices. These include: lecturers' use of the feedback genre to produce and reproduce the boundaries of academic knowledge and the specific disciplinary knowledges relating to criminology, the relationship between the writing of feedback and academic identities, and how and why particular modes of writing are privileged within the academy.

My focus on a specific academic department in a new university in the UK reflects my intended emphasis on the localised and situated nature of the processes under investigation. However, it also responds to a call by some authors (Trowler, 2000, 2005; Trowler, Fanghanel, & Wareham, 2005) for studies analysing the 'missing meso level' (Trowler, 2005, p.15) in educational research. Trowler (2005) suggests that much of the sociological research on learning, teaching and assessment takes place at the micro-level (the individual) or at the macro-level (the institution). Departmental culture in particular has been relatively neglected by higher education scholarship and there has been little research on how it shapes and is shaped by wider disciplinary and institutional frameworks (J. Lee, 2007). This is an important omission because it is at the meso-level that 'changes actually take place, and a good theoretical understanding of how and why this happens – or doesn't happen – is therefore necessary' (Trowler, et al., 2005, p.435). Furthermore, Clegg (2005) argues that an examination of the everyday practices of staff enables agency, structure and their inter-relationship to be theorised more effectively. Paying attention to the 'mundane' processes through which staff and students engage in the practices of learning and teaching, she contends, offers a valuable counterpoint to broader macro-sociological accounts which may underplay the importance of individual agency.

The choice of criminology as the disciplinary focus of the study was motivated primarily by the intention, in keeping with the specific orientation of professional doctorate programmes, to contribute to academic knowledge in the context of my

own professional practice. Although I currently work as a lecturer in higher education in a central academic development unit, my disciplinary background is in criminal law and criminal justice, and I have been involved in the teaching, learning and assessment of criminology since 1991. I am therefore familiar with the relevant disciplinary conventions and practices and can draw on my subject knowledge and professional experience to frame the analysis of the data collected in the course of this project.

These considerations aside, the discipline of criminology also represents a particularly rich environment for the study of academic writing practices. Rock describes criminology as 'an eclectic discipline marked by an abundance of theoretical overlaps, syntheses and confusions' (Rock, 2007, p.33) and Hil (2002, no pagination) suggests that it 'covers a vast spectrum of epistemologies which are distinguished not by theoretical and practical coherence and clarity but by deep division, confusion and ontological uncertainty'. This theoretical and methodological pluralism presents significant challenges in terms of curriculum design and development, team teaching and marking, where different subject specialists may bring diverse epistemological and ontological approaches to the object of study. Students may experience a range of difficulties in negotiating the terrains of the different disciplinary discourses and confusion about the potentially different expectations from staff. This multiplicity of disciplinary, theoretical and methodological perspectives and the multidisciplinary and fragmented knowledge base suggests that it is an environment likely to be characterised by a diversity of potentially conflicting academic writing conventions.

## 1.2 The Origins and Development of the Thesis

The structure of professional doctorate programmes is such that the selection of the thesis topic and the development of a research proposal usually occur at the midpoint of the registration period, rather than, as is the case with PhDs, before registration or in the very early stages of study. This has the advantage that the selection of the research topic and the development of the theoretical and methodological approaches to the research can be informed by the range of learning opportunities available in the taught element of the programme, including workshops, the work done for assignments and supervision sessions with tutors. Another distinctive feature of the

professional doctorate, the cohort approach, also provides informal learning opportunities arising from seminar discussions, email exchanges and networking with other students. In the sections below, I trace the impact that these opportunities have had on the origins and development of my thesis.

The initial phase of the degree was the common taught component which comprised three modules, three pieces of assessed work and six weekend workshops. The first module, 'Research and the Professional', was helpful in explicating some issues relating to researching professional practice that are directly relevant to my thesis, including the nature of professional knowledge and ethical dimensions of researching professional practice. The first assignment was a review and critique of an article about becoming a manager-academic in higher education (Johnson, 2002). The article drew on Lave and Wenger's communities of practice approach (1991), which I subsequently explored as a possible theoretical construct through which to understand the socialisation into the norms of specific disciplinary discourses. That assessment also drew on issues relating to notions of tacit professional knowledge (Eraut, 1994, 2000), which are relevant to how academic writing practices can be made explicit.

The second module, 'Research Methods and Methodology', was concerned with the epistemological and ontological underpinning of debates about academic and professional knowledge and how it is constructed and represented. The assignment for this module required an exploration of the methodological issues arising from the design and pilot of a research instrument. For this piece of work I attempted to uncover, through a series of semi-structured interviews, some explanations for disparities in marking practices between academics in my department. Despite the use of internal and external moderation processes, external examiners' reports, marking exercises and other staff development activities, there still seemed to be some contestation over the norms and conventions of academic writing. One of the tentative conclusions that I drew from the research was that approaches to marking appeared to be connected to markers' own writing and literacy practices, which were often embedded in wider epistemological and methodological subject positions.

The final module in phase 1 was 'Research and Evaluation in Professional Organisations'. This module aimed to develop an understanding of how internal research and evaluation can contribute to professional practice within an organisation. The workshops explored issues in relation to organisational culture and micro-politics, insider research and the wider political dimensions of evaluation research. For this assignment I undertook a small scale empirical project which evaluated the provision of study skills to distance-learning students. One of the key issues that emerged from the evaluation was that academic writing was treated simply as a set of technical transferable skills, and did not acknowledge the diversity of disciplinary writing or how norms and conventions might be located in wider social, interpersonal and institutional contexts. Using the academic literacies model developed by Lea and Street (1998), I concluded that the current provision was situated within a behaviourist model which adopted an individualist and technicist approach to academic practice, and which left the underlying assumptions unexamined and uncontested. This seemed particularly problematic in the context of writing practices within a multidisciplinary department where there was a diversity of epistemological, disciplinary and methodological approaches. From this assignment, therefore, I derived the substantive topic for the final thesis and also one of the central conceptual frameworks – the academic literacies approach – which underpins it.

The second phase of the professional doctorate programme was the specialist component which was delivered through six weekend workshops on substantive educational issues, social theory and methodological concepts. The formal learning programme workshops and seminars in this phase of the programme were particularly helpful in developing the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the thesis. Sessions on Foucault, Bourdieu and feminist poststructuralist theory provided a starting point for an exploration of discourse, knowledge and identity which form the central organising themes of this thesis.

The CAS, submitted at the end of the second year of the programme, aimed to pull together the strands developed in earlier assignments through a critical analysis of the relevant academic literature relating to academic writing. This review indicated that

the research on academic writing had developed into two largely distinct fields – one on writing by students and another on writing by academics. Although acknowledging that these could be treated as distinct genres, I argued that isolating student writing from the wider field of academic writing was problematic in both theoretical and pedagogical terms. In theoretical terms, it is liable to produce an incomplete understanding of the process of discourse production in universities. Student writing is framed by the academic conventions of wider disciplinary discourses and academic staff are heavily implicated in the regulation and policing of these conventions. It follows that in pedagogical terms, strategies which do not address the role of academics and their writing practices are likely to be of limited effectiveness. This suggested that there is a need for research that acknowledges the relationship between academic and student writing practices and which focuses on the interactions between staff and students as a site of knowledge construction in the university.

In addition to opening up this substantive space for research, the CAS was also valuable in developing the theoretical and methodological foundations for the final thesis. In the study, I explored three different theoretical approaches:  Bourdieu's work on field and *habitus* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), discourse communities and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Woodward-Kron, 2004) and activity theory (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki-Gitai, 1999) as a starting point to consider how writing in the university might be theorised. All three approaches focused on the interactions that take place within particular fields or communities or systems and offered insights into the dynamic nature of relationships between the participants. These suggested the possibility of developing an understanding of student writing which takes account of the interplay between students and academics in the co-construction of writing practices in the academy. They also provided the possibility of developing an explanatory framework which accounted for the situated nature of academic writing practices at both the disciplinary and departmental meso-levels of analysis. Although the theoretical framing of the thesis has subsequently developed in a different direction, these accounts were useful in considering how to theorise the complex interactional processes involved in the construction of student writing practices.

Finally, in terms of methodology, the study focussed on the possibility of using ethnographic approaches and on the practical and ethical issues inherent in researching one's own professional practice. The literature review suggested that a diverse range of qualitative and quantitative approaches had been employed to investigate academic writing including surveys, interviews, corpus analysis and think-aloud protocols. However, it was the ethnographic approaches employed by Lillis (2001) and Ivanic (1998) in relation to student writing and by sociologists in relation to scientific knowledge and representation (Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Myers, 1990) that appeared to offer the most productive approach because of their emphasis on a detailed exploration of social processes and culture at a local level.

**1.3    The Higher Education Context**

Although my research focuses specifically on the construction and regulation of academic writing through written feedback in a very specific disciplinary and institutional context – a criminology department in a post-1992 university in the UK – the research has implications for a number of wider policy debates in higher education. Academic writing raises issues about literacy and literacy practices and concerns about educational standards and widening participation. The feedback that lecturers give on student work can also be positioned within the broader context of assessment practices, changing literacy practices and the 'student as consumer'.

Despite the centrality of writing to academic life, the nature and quality of writing within the academy has been a matter of increasing concern in recent years. Current debates about student writing are often set in the context of a 'literacy crisis' in higher education with the media reporting concerns by employers, lecturers and government bodies about students' literacy skills (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004). Research undertaken for the Royal Literacy Fund, for example, found that 65% of 127 academic staff surveyed agreed that students' proficiency in writing had declined (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2004, p.18). Employers' views on writing standards have been particularly prominent in the media and in debates about academic standards. These link to wider agendas about employability and the knowledge economy, and to the increasing dominance of the knowledge and skills discourse in higher education (Blackmore,

2002; Olssen & Peters, 2005). They can also be connected to reservations about the entry of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and associated fears about dumbing down and falling standards in higher education (Leathwood & Read, 2009).

The quality of writing by academics is also an issue. Broadhead and Howard (1998) identify the paradox in which the drive for excellence which the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) professed to promote, has reduced the value and rigour of published outputs and led to a focus on quantity rather than quality. Although RAE ratings and outputs have seen a year on year increase, Lucas (2006) argues that these can be explained, at least in part, by academics' familiarity with the rules of the 'research game'. Through using academic capital acquired through networking and contacts, they are able to deploy their published outputs in a way that maximises their performance under the RAE rules. Another contention is that the RAE has deterred staff from publishing textbooks and pedagogic articles (Jenkins, 1995) or in professional journals (McNay, 1999), reducing the impact of academic work on public policy and practice. There have been related discussions about the extent to which published academic writing is needlessly difficult or obscure (Culler & Lamb, 2003) and fails to communicate effectively with the wider public. These criticisms can be linked to a wider debate around the role of the academic in public life in the UK and a perceived trend towards disengagement and a 'retreat from citizenship' (Macfarlane, 2005).

Concerns about standards of literacy are not confined to the higher education context, and the issues relating to academic writing identified above can also be positioned in the wider context of the future of literacies in a digital age. The impact of computers, the internet and information and communication technologies has prompted a reconceptualisation of literacy, with a shift away from defining literacy in terms of traditional reading and writing skills and towards the ability to adapt to communicative practices in a range of media (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Other authors have predicted a more radical shift away from writing as the dominant mode of communication and towards a post-literate world in which other communication technologies predominate (Hedges, 2009). These more radical forecasts have been

tempered by a cynicism arising from previous, somewhat premature announcements about the death of the book and the end of print. Whilst there is no doubt that the growth of multimodal and multimedia communicative technologies presents a challenge to the continuing dominance of writing and written texts in the university context, Morris (2009) also sounds a note of caution. His evidence suggests that whilst computer and internet use were almost universal amongst the student population, the majority of students lacked the information literacy skills to critically evaluate the sources that they used.

A final set of policy debates relates to assessment and feedback. Assessment in general, and feedback in particular, continues to be identified as one of the least satisfactory areas of student experience by respondents to the National Student Survey (Williams & Kane, 2009). At national, institutional and departmental level, students consistently award some of the lowest scores on the question asking whether staff have provided feedback which is sufficiently detailed or helpful. The role of feedback is a key indicator in the consumerist and quality assurance discourses, although Higgins, et al. (2002) suggest that individual students are as much motivated by the intrinsic desire to improve their performance and enhance their learning as they are by seeking value for money or a marketable qualification.

The issue of writing can therefore be seen as a current matter of concern for universities, employers and the government, and one which has wider implications for higher education policy and practice. However, it also has implications for my own personal and professional practice as an academic. Writing is the central currency of a social science discipline and students' achievement is judged on and constrained by the extent to which their knowledge can be performed in writing in the appropriate academic genre. Yet my evaluation of the current study skills provision for criminology students (Creaton, 2006c) suggests that existing initiatives appear to be having limited success in improving students' writing practices. The aim in this thesis is not simply to explore the abstract theoretical and methodological insights that the analysis has revealed, but to consider how some of these insights might be applied to improve my own professional practice and that of the wider academic community.

**1.4     The Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided into six chapters. This first chapter sets the scene for the thesis by locating it in the context of the work that has been done for the professional doctorate to date. It identifies the genesis of the thesis topic and traces the key methodological and epistemological considerations that have informed the choice of the research questions and the design of the project. The chapter also establishes the importance of the topic and positions it within the existing research literature and wider educational discourses around widening participation and literacy and assessment practices.

The second chapter introduces the conceptual underpinnings of the thesis. It begins with an overview and analysis of the academic literacies model of student writing, which provides the main theoretical framework for the research. The next section explains how this theoretical orientation informed the choice of a linguistic ethnography methodology, which I suggest is an appropriate methodology through which to capture the quotidian micro-social interactions of academic writing and to locate them within the macro socio-economic context. The chapter concludes with a detailed account of the specific methods that have been used to collect and analyse the data which form the basis of the empirical element of the thesis.

Chapter 3 explores the institutional context through an analysis of the relevant policies and procedures relating to marking, assessment and feedback. The chapter begins with an overview of the concept of discourse in social theory and different approaches to analysing discourse, before identifying and discussing three key discourses which are evident in the documentation: scientific, quality assurance and learning and teaching.

Chapter 4 focuses on feedback practices, by examining the textual responses made by staff to student writing and the accounts that staff give about the assessment and feedback processes in which they are engaged. This analysis of the micro-level interactions between staff and students foregrounds the epistemological and gatekeeping functions of feedback. The chapter explores how markers respond to the

different types of knowledge – academic, disciplinary, personal and professional – which students draw on in their writing. It discusses how the boundaries of academic knowledge are produced and reproduced through the feedback that markers give.

Chapter 5 is concerned with issues of self and identity. It begins with a discussion of the theoretical understandings of the relationship between writing and identity and then goes on to explore two different aspects of identity constructed through feedback: the institutional self and the pedagogical self. I suggest that the feedback encounter reveals, not just how students learn and engage in academic writing, but how academics perform and maintain their identity role and stance through their writing and feedback practices.

The final chapter of the thesis summarises the key issues identified by the research and then explores the original contribution of the thesis to knowledge in more detail, exploring the empirical, theoretical, methodological and professional implications in turn. I conclude with a final reflection on the impact of the research findings and the process of undertaking the research on my own professional practice and professional development.

# CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

Research methods textbooks often characterise the selection of an appropriate research methodology as part of a relatively linear process in which methodology follows ineluctably from a particular ontological or epistemological position or from the research questions which the project seeks to address. Although this heuristic model may be helpful for analytical purposes, it tends to oversimplify the complexities of research and obscure the recursive nature of the planning and implementation of a project. Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005, p.4) use the metaphor of an 'elastic plane' to capture the more dynamic and messy process of doing research, in which ontological, epistemological, ethical, macro-political, micro-political and practical issues intersect to create tensions and pull in different directions.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a coherent conceptual underpinning to the thesis, whilst acknowledging some of the complexities and messiness of the research process itself. The first part of the chapter introduces the academic literacies framework, which is the key perspective that has influenced the theoretical orientation of the thesis. The second part of the chapter explains how this theoretical approach guided the choice of the methodological framework and the research methods used in the study. The term 'methodology' is used here to describe the rationale for how the research has been conducted, taking into account the various issues to which Dunne, et al. (2005) refer. The term 'methods' describes the specific set of techniques that were used to collect and analyse the data which form the basis of the empirical element of the thesis.

## 2.1    The Theoretical Framework: Academic Literacies

The primary theoretical frame in which I am locating this study is the academic literacies approach, developed by Lea and Street (1998). Their work has been extremely influential in theorising the different approaches to student writing and in exploring some of the assumptions and ideologies underpinning academic practices. Lea and Street (1998) suggest there are three main ways in which student writing in higher education has been conceptualised. The first is the study skills model, which is

based on the premise that students have a deficit in their writing practices which can be addressed through learning a set of skills. The second approach, the academic socialisation model, views the process of learning to write in higher education as a process of acculturation, through which the student is inducted into the institutional culture of the academy. The third approach, and the one which Lea and Street (1998) advocate, is an academic literacies model in which literacies are understood as multiple and often conflicting social practices.

The academic literacies framework has its origins in the New Literacy Studies movement, which challenged conventional definitions of literacy and interrogated how particular conceptions of literacy become dominant or are marginalised (Street, 2003b). In the context of student writing, this critical approach acknowledged higher education institutions as sites of discourse and power, and understood academic practices as reflecting issues of epistemology and identity rather than simply issues of skill or socialisation. It broadened the frame of reference from the individual student or from departmental or disciplinary culture, to the practices of the academy and wider processes of knowledge production.

Lea and Street (1998) found that academic staff had well-defined views about what constituted good student writing, but these were often related to the specific field of study in which the member of staff was located, and reflected particular ways of knowing or telling that were instantiated in disciplinary discourses. However, staff often struggled to articulate these views to students through the assessment criteria or the written feedback given on assessed pieces of work. Students studying across a range of subject areas were faced with writing in a range of different genres, styles and discourses, which were often presented as the natural and only way of presenting knowledge. They concluded from an analysis of the data that differences between staff and student understandings of the writing process were 'at levels of epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge' (Lea & Street, 1998, p.160). They argued, therefore, that problems relating to student writing have to be tackled at three different levels: focussing on students, interactions between tutors and students and on institutional practices and procedures.

There is an extensive literature which draws on the academic literacies framework to explore issues relating to learning, teaching and assessment. A substantial piece of research was undertaken by Lillis (2001) in relation to mature and black and minority ethnic students. She used the academic literacies model to situate the experiences of her students within institutional and social contexts which, she argued, regulate 'directly and indirectly what student-writers can mean, and who they can be' (Lillis, 2001, p.39). The academic literacies approach has also been employed as a theoretical framework through which to explore the writing difficulties faced by other specific groups of students within higher education, including black students (Thesen, 2001), nursing students (Baynham, 2000), distance-learning (Lea, 2001), and postgraduate students (Stierer, 1997). Other writers have used it to theorise different aspects of learning, teaching and assessment practices, including online collaborative learning (Macdonald, 2001), assessment feedback (Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2001) and plagiarism (East, 2006).

There has been little sustained critique of the academic literacies model, and the notion of student writing as social practice is relatively uncontested in the current research literature. However, the theoretical framework does have some limitations. The first is that the model has limited applicability as a pedagogical frame for action. As Lillis (2003, p.195) points out, although it posits a powerful critique of current practices and pedagogies relating to student writing, 'little explicit attention has been paid to exploring how an academic literacies stance might inform the theory and practice of student writing pedagogy'. In subsequent work, Lea (2004) acknowledges Lillis' central criticism and examines how the academic literacies model might be used to inform course design through a case study of an online postgraduate course. She identifies a number of principles that emerge from the academic literacies research and which can be applied in this context. These include: acknowledging students' prior literacy experiences and practices and addressing sites of potential disjuncture, being explicit about the specific textual forms and practices that are used and providing more detailed and discursive information about the assessment criteria. This, she argues,

allows students to be drawn into higher education as active participants in the construction of knowledge through texts.

Lea (2004) herself makes the point that the texts that she creates on the basis of these principles are not unlike those which are used in other postgraduate courses. However, a more fundamental point is that the principles, and Lea's application of them, seem more aligned to the academic socialisation model than to the academic literacies approach. These principles seem concerned with making visible issues of power, for example between tutor and student, or between academic and non-academic discourse. Whilst this is an important step, the existing power structures remain uncontested and unchallenged. In contrast, Lillis (2003) argues for a more radical transformation of pedagogical practice. She uses Bakhtin's work as a theoretical framework through which to argue for a shift away from monologic approaches that privilege the single authoritative voice of the tutor and towards dialogic approaches which include a range of discourses and voices. Practical examples of this approach include: 'talkback' rather than feedback on students' written texts, opening up disciplinary content to a wider range of external interests and influences, and opening up academic writing conventions to new and different ways of knowing. This, she argues, is the crucial theoretical step through which an academic literacies approach can shift from a design frame to a pedagogical frame.

A second criticism of the academic literacies model is that the focus on the situatedness of specific literacy practices in specific contexts fails to engage with wider sociological concepts. These are concepts such as power, class and gender, which operate at a macro-level but influence practices at a local level. So, for example, the academic literacies model may be able to identify and explain how specific forms of academic literacy are maintained and reinforced in particular disciplinary, departmental or institutional contexts, but it is less able to account for why these continue to be successfully produced and reproduced within the academy. In response to criticisms that these local and situated approaches 'relativised' and 'romanticised' the local context (Street, 2003a), there has been an increasing trend to link micro-level perspectives with macro-level theories from wider social theory. Clear conceptual links

already existed between some of the theoretical strands of the new literacy and poststructuralist analyses of language, through, for example, the concept of discourse and an orientation towards social constructivism. Some recent work in the academic literacies field draws more explicitly on poststructuralist notions of power, language and identity, to theorise literacy in a way which accounts for the operation of literacy practices in wider institutional and global contexts (J. Collins & Blot, 2003).

A poststructuralist framework is particularly useful in exploring feedback literacy practices and how these are situated within assessment frameworks. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault (1977) develops the concept of disciplinary power, in which the individual and collective subject is subjugated through specific techniques of control. The examination is a technique that combines hierarchical observation with normalizing judgment. In the university context, students are required to present their work for scrutiny as part of the assessment process and to comply with the relevant norms and conventions of academic writing. Through this process, the examinee becomes an object to be classified and judged. Furthermore, Foucault draws attention to the textuality of this process: 'the examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them' (1977, p.189).

A final criticism of the academic literacies model is that it does not sufficiently theorise the role of academics and tutors in the construction of student literacy practices. Lea and Street's (1998) research included interviews with academic staff and an analysis of feedback that was given on student work. They acknowledged the impact that staff had on student writing practices through setting assessments, identifying criteria and giving feedback on student work. However, in the academic literacies model, the role that staff play in the active construction and regulation of student writing practices is somewhat obscured. Individual academics' own writing practices and the ontological and epistemological views which underpin them are clearly significant in how they frame student writing requirements. Yet, in this model, these individual perspectives are aggregated as disciplinary and/or institutional concerns.

It is the gap in knowledge opened up by this final criticism that this thesis seeks to address. My research seeks to investigate the role of staff in regulating student writing practices at one specific site of textual engagement and to explore how this engagement is shaped by the specific departmental, disciplinary and institutional contexts in which it is located. By conceptualising interactions between staff and students as a site of knowledge production and consumption in the university, I aim to provide an account of how student writing is regulated in one particular department and discipline within the academy.

## 2.2    The Methodological Framework: Linguistic Ethnography

The academic literacies model suggests that writing is situated in specific contexts and produced and reproduced through interactions at a micro-level. However, as literacy practices are also seen as embedded in wider social processes, this implies that a close examination of written texts can provide an insight into these processes. Researchers in the academic literacies tradition have therefore tended to adopt methodological approaches which connect linguistic analysis with an ethnographic focus on the social context. The research project from which the academic literacies model was originally developed drew on interviews with staff and students, participant observation of group sessions and analysis of textual material including samples of student work, handouts on essay writing and written feedback to explore literacy practices in two different universities (Lea & Street, 1998). Both Lillis (2001) and Ivanic (1998) based their work on detailed ethnographic studies which drew upon their practitioner experience of working with non-traditional students as they engaged in academic writing.

This type of text-oriented ethnography has come to be associated with the term 'linguistic ethnography'. Linguistic ethnography is a particular methodological approach that attempts to combine the fine-grained study of culture, typical of ethnographic accounts, with a wider focus on the discoursal functions of text and talk. Creese (2008, p.229) describes linguistic ethnography as 'a theoretical and methodological development orientating towards particular, established traditions but defining itself in the new intellectual climate of late modernity and poststructuralism'.

Although some of the specific methods employed by linguistic ethnographers, such as discourse analysis and narrative analysis, are neither new nor unique, Creese points out that a key difference lies in the repositioning of these techniques within new ontological and epistemological frameworks.

Rampton, et al. (2004) suggest that linguistic ethnography tries to steer a path between over-essentialising language as the mechanism through which culture is produced (as may be the case in some postmodern theory) and in underestimating the powerful function of language as a mechanism for constructing culture (as may be the case in some ethnography). They describe this as a process of 'tying ethnography down' and 'opening linguistics up' (Rampton, et al., 2004, p.4). By tying ethnography down they are referring to grounding ethnographic approaches more clearly in the analytical frameworks that linguistics can provide, because close analyses of situated language use can 'provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity' (Rampton, et al., 2004, p.2). By opening linguistics up, they mean locating linguistics more clearly in the contextual framework within which these encounters take place.

Linguistic ethnography includes in its antecedents the New Literacy Studies movement, which provided the theoretical basis for much of the academic literacies research outlined earlier. Researchers associated with this movement used ethnographic approaches to explore the situatedness of literacy practices within particular contexts and frameworks of power (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 1994; Street, Rogers, & Baker, 2006), establishing the potential synergy between linguistics and ethnography. However, linguistic ethnography also draws on critical discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, neo-Vygotskian language research and interpretive applied linguistics in shaping its analytic sensibilities (Rampton, 2006). For this reason Rampton (2007, p.585) prefers to describe linguistic ethnography as 'a site of encounter where a number of established lines of research interact'.

Given the relative recency of the emergence of linguistic ethnography as a distinct area of research, critics have been mainly concerned with its claims to methodological

distinctness and to where its boundaries lie. Hammersley (2007), for example, questions whether linguistic ethnography represents any significant departure in ethnography, given that ethnographic studies are already grounded in micro-interactional data. He suggests that the linguistic ethnographic tag may be simply a form of rebranding exercise for the purpose of establishing a new academic niche. Wetherall (2007) takes an alternative position, accepting that the marriage of linguistics and ethnography opens up an new space for investigating communication in context, but arguing that this space also needs to include psychology as well as language and culture. These critiques will be revisited in the final chapter of the thesis, when the methodological implications of the study are explored.

## 2.3    Situating the Research

A central purpose of ethnography is to 'discover the cultural knowledge that people hold in their minds, how it is employed in social interaction, and the consequences of this employment' (G Spindler & L Spindler, 1992, p.70). Ethnographic research is therefore typically concerned with achieving an in-depth understanding and analysis of a single case or single site, and my study takes one university department, the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies (ICJS), as its focus. ICJS was established in 1992 as the Institute of Police and Criminological Studies, reflecting its original mission to provide part-time undergraduate and postgraduate distance-learning courses to police officers. In 1997 it took on its new name, began offering a full-time undergraduate course in criminology, and became a separate department within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Portsmouth. ICJS has now expanded to become the largest criminology department in the UK, with over 50 members of academic staff and 2000 students. Courses offered range from foundation degree through to professional doctorate level, delivered in campus-based and distance-learning modes and to full time undergraduate students and to criminal justice professionals studying part-time (see Appendix 1).

As I explained in the first chapter, the choice of a criminology department as the site of the study was influenced by a mix of practical, professional and methodological reasons. The relative novelty of criminology as an undergraduate discipline and its

diversity of disciplinary antecedents made it a particularly interesting site for the study of academic writing practices. However, locating the research in the department in which I was a 'complete-member-researcher' (Adler & Adler, 1987, p.35) was advantageous for other reasons. Access to the site did not have to be negotiated, I could readily locate a range of data through my then position as Associate Head (Quality) and I was already familiar with the staff, the institutional procedures and the disciplinary context. Data gathering could therefore be accomplished not simply through the external researcher perspective but through 'the subjectively immersed role as well' (Adler & Adler, 1987, p.84). Furthermore, locating the study within my own department enabled me to make the contribution to professional practice which is one of the distinguishing features of the professional doctorate (Neumann, 2005).

Alvesson (2003) uses the term 'self-ethnography' to describe a study and a text in which the researcher writes about a cultural setting that is naturally accessible to him or her as an active participant on more or less equal terms as other participants. He argues that self-ethnography has particular methodological value over other research strategies in the context of an academic environment. Firstly, academics' familiarity with research practices and processes may result in interviews which are more performative and less authentic than with participants who are less experienced in this area. This latter issue is, of course, not unique to researching academics. There are many other groups of informants who are well versed in the art of self-presentation and this issue is often addressed in the sizeable literature on the methodological issues relating to researching elites (Ball, 1994; Conti & O'Neil, 2007; Dexter, 2006; Seldon, 1996). A second, more important, point is the suggestion that academics' dominant position within the field of social research has enabled them to escape the same level of scrutiny that they have applied to other occupations and professions. The implication is that self-ethnography is a mechanism through which to explore issues and environments that might otherwise go unresearched because of the professional power and privilege of the participants.

The concept of self-ethnography has been subject to considerable criticism from mainstream ethnographers who have argued that the work is neither sufficiently

sociological nor academic. The social anthropological roots of ethnography are reflected in its concern with the exploration of the cultures of the 'other', and in traditional ethnographic accounts this has involved the researcher 'making the strange familiar' through immersion in unfamiliar contexts and fields. The notion of exploring one's own culture – the notion of 'being native' rather than 'going native' has a more recent history. The coining of the term 'autoethnography' has been ascribed to Hayano (1979) although earlier uses have been identified in the literature both for the term and the practice that it describes. Since then, however, this term has tended to be used in reference to work where the focus of the ethnographic account is one's own experience of a particular phenomenon and in which the self becomes both subject and object. Ellis and Bochner (2000), for example, have written about their direct personal experiences of death, abortion and relationships and Stanley (1993) drew on her experience of her mother's final days of life to theorise about knowing the subjects of research.

This sort of evocative ethnography has been criticised for valuing narrative over analysis and personal subjective experience over generalisation. Van Maanen (1988, p.93) notes the dangers of an overly personal and reflexive text resulting in a 'vanity ethnography' which is of little value to anyone other than the writer. Whilst recognising the importance of this type of work in disrupting boundaries between the subject and object of study, Anderson (2006, p.373) has argued for an 'analytical autoethnography' which foregrounds analytical reflexivity and the narrative visibility of the researcher, but also makes a commitment to a dialogue with informants beyond the self. This approach retains the ethnographic imperative to understand and make sense of the social world of which the researcher is a part and a theoretical imperative to gain insights into social phenomena that transcend the data themselves.

Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) take a less polarised view of the dimensions of self-ethnography, preferring to posit a continuum between the 'researcher-and-researched' and 'researcher-is-researched' along which all ethnographies may lie. At one end, is autoethnography which is strongly autobiographical in nature, the researcher is the researched and a deep level of disclosure and reflection is anticipated

and expected (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Letherby, 2000; Stanley, 1993). At the other end is the introduction of the researcher as a character in the research and a source of data, reflections and experiences but with a 'commitment to dialogue beyond the self' (Anderson, 2006, 378). It is towards this latter end of the continuum that I aim to situate this study, by drawing on my professional knowledge, experience and practice to contextualise and make sense of the data that I have collected from other sources.

## 2.4     The Research Process

Ethnography can be situated within interpretative analytic approaches to research which emphasise the importance of deep understanding or *Verstehen* and thus meshes with symbolic interactionist, ethnomethodological and hermeneutical approaches within the qualitative research tradition. Ethnography has a long history within anthropology and sociology (G. Spindler & L. Spindler, 1992) and covers such a wide range of methods and approaches, that Mason (2002, p.55) acknowledges that it is 'faintly ridiculous' to describe it as a unified method or perspective. Nevertheless, there are certain key features that can be ascribed to an ethnographic approach to research within educational contexts and Walford's (2009) typology provides a useful starting point. This identifies seven elements which he identifies as the minimum requirements for a study to be called ethnographic. These are: study of a culture, multiple methods, engagement, researcher as instrument, multiple perspectives, a cycle of hypothesis and theory building, and intention and outcome. To qualify as ethnographic, a study should be concerned with the values, practices and relationships which constitute or reflect the particular cultural context in which the research is located and particularly with identifying the tacit knowledge and understandings through which practices are accomplished.

To achieve this, ethnography requires engagement with, and immersion in, a particular cultural setting. Although participant observation is often seen as the hallmark of the ethnographic method, ethnography usually involves a multi-method approach, drawing on conversations, documentation and, more recently, visual artefacts (Pink, 2007) to generate data. In using each of these methods, however, the ethnographer is the primary research instrument and the ethnography is a subjective account of the

encounter with the cultural context that is the object of the research. Although reflexivity and the sensitivity to the role of the researcher is a feature of many qualitative research approaches, ethnography does, perhaps, involve a greater degree of explicit researcher involvement.

The ethnographic approach extends beyond the collection of data through to the analysis and the writing up stages of the research. Ethnographic research requires an emergent design in which initial hypotheses and theories about the data are constantly re-examined and modified in the light of experience in the field. The intention is to 'discover the cultural knowledge that people hold in their minds, how it is employed in social interaction, and the consequences of this employment' (G. Spindler & L. Spindler, 1992, p.70). Ethnographic research tends, therefore, to be context specific, although in providing sufficient detail about aspects of the research setting, the intention is that readers may be able to generalise to other places and contexts.

An important feature of Walford's (1998) typology is that it emphasises that ethnography is not simply a method of data collection but a methodology, or a 'broad methodological and philosophical framework into which these procedural rules fit' (Brewer, 2000, p.2). Lillis (2008) however, suggests that a commitment to ethnography as methodology requires more than simply the adoption of an ethnographic sensibility in contextualising or examining the relationship between text and context. Ethnography as methodology requires, she suggests, a deeper commitment to the length of time that is taken to investigate the specific topic and to a diversity of different methods to achieve rich participation as well as rich description. This epistemological dimension of ethnography, in which ethnography is seen as a process of producing and representing knowledge, is crucial to an understanding of the role of language within ethnography and ethnographic accounts, where it meshes with poststructuralist accounts of power and discourse.

Although there are several critiques of ethnography and the ethnographic method (Banfield, 2004; Hammersley, 1990), two are particularly relevant here. The first relates to the potentially exploitative nature of the method. Ethnography's

commitment to an insider perspective, its emphasis on the situatedness of experience and the close attention to culture and context meant that it was initially seen as a method which was highly compatible with the goals and approaches of feminist research (Skeggs, 2001). However, Stacey's (1988) experience of undertaking ethnographic research led her to question this assumption. She concluded that the method was an inherently exploitative form of research which was obscured by a relationship between the researcher and research based on a false sense of intimacy, mutuality and equality. She concluded that ethnographic fieldwork 'represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships that the researcher is far freer to leave' (Stacey, 1988, p.23).

Her second key concern was about how ethnographic research was written up and represented in a way which privileged the researcher's perspectives and interpretations. This issue had been raised by Clifford and Marcus (1986) who problematised the academic discourse through which fieldwork and culture was represented. Their account of how ethnographic accounts were constructed through narrative conventions prompted reflections on the rhetorical practices within ethnography, how the researched were represented through text and also the power relations inherent in the production and authority of written texts. Their work suggested that the dominant modes of ethnographic discourse privileged particular forms of power and knowledge and shaped how the researcher and the researched were represented within anthropological and ethnographic texts.

There is no doubt that the close and extended relationships that are a hallmark of the ethnographic method raise a number of ethical dilemmas for the researcher to negotiate. It is also the case that careful attention needs to be paid to where power lies and that considerable sensitivity is needed in researching and representing people who are potentially vulnerable. However, some of the concerns invoked by Stacey (1988) rely on a conception of power in which all the power is possessed by the researcher and none by the researched. Yet, as Skeggs (1994, p.81) has argued, the 'the power of the researcher is not unidimensional'. In her research, she felt that the participants resisted her agenda where it was not in their interest and engaged with

her research on their own terms. She suggests that the issue with ethnographic research is not that it is more exploitative than other research, but that these issues are made more visible. Similarly, whilst the 'crisis of representation' originated in concerns about ethnographic writing, where the researcher is often more visible in the text, it prompted a reflexive turn across the humanities and social sciences about how academic authority is constructed and represented within the text (MacLure, 2003).

### 2.4.1 Sources of Data

My research drew on three main sources of data: written feedback, interviews with members of staff about student writing and the feedback given on it, and institutional documentation. The first source of data was the written feedback given by staff on student assignments. This feedback was obtained from 120 samples of student work sent to external examiners in the 2008/9 academic year. The *Examination and Assessment Regulations* (University of Portsmouth, 2009b) require that at the end of each semester external examiners are sent an adequate sample of student work for each unit of study. The samples are compiled by administrative staff and copied and retained by the department for quality assurance purposes for up to five years. These retained samples provided an accessible source of naturally occurring data for the study through which some of the embedded conventions around criminology and criminological discourse could be explored.

The size and composition of the sample sent to the external examiners can be decided by negotiation and ICJS sends 10% of the total assessment diet for a unit (subject to a minimum of 6 scripts and a maximum of 20) in a sample which includes all fails and a cross section of work from other grades. As ICJS had 191 units in the 2008/9 academic year, there were approximately 1400 artefacts that were sent to external examiners. In selecting artefacts for analysis, I decided to sample on a unit basis and selected six units from level 1 and six units from level 2. In order to include as many different markers as possible, I began by selecting large team-taught core units. I then sought to obtain maximum variation in the types of unit in the sample by identifying units from distance-learning and campus-based courses, from different named pathways, from options and core units, from different disciplines and sub-disciplines within

criminology and with different types of assessment artefact. I had originally intended to include units from level 3, but the units in the final year of study are largely composed of optional units which have relatively small numbers of students and deal with fairly specialised areas of criminological research. The final sample comprised 120 pieces of marked work from 12 different units (see Appendix 2).

A second source of data was a series of semi-structured interviews with 18 members of academic staff who taught on level one of the full-time undergraduate single or combined honours programmes in criminology. Six staff were based in ICJS, four in psychology, four in law and four in sociology (see Appendix 3). The purpose of these interviews was to obtain contextual information about the unit requirements, including the nature of the assessments set and expectations about academic writing. The interviews also explored the nature of different disciplinary writing conventions, the types of evidence that students are encouraged to use and the informants' orientations to academic writing (see schedule in Appendix 4). The interviews lasted between 25 minutes and an hour and were transcribed using a transcription service, funded by a University Learning and Teaching Award.

The third main source of data was institutional documentation which related to aspects of writing, feedback and assessment. This included university policy and procedures such as the *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students* (University of Portsmouth, 2009a) and the *Examination and Assessment Regulations* (University of Portsmouth, 2009b); departmental documentation such as unit handbooks and assessment questions, guidance for students and notes for markers; and essay writing and study skills guidance produced by ICJS, the Academic Skills Unit and the University Library. I also referred to external examiner feedback, National Student Survey data, student questionnaires, focus group data and made use of my own professional and personal experience to provide additional contextual information where appropriate.

These three key sources of data provided a rich source of evidence for a linguistic ethnographic analysis in which the study of situated language use is grounded in a particular social and institutional context. However, the selection of these sources did

have some limitations in supporting a more sociological analysis of aspects such as identity and agency and their intersections with gender, social class and so on. Whilst a discourse analysis of written feedback on student work and the analysis of institutional policies may provide an insight into the discursive construction of feedback, knowledge and identity within the academy, it cannot necessarily account for how gender, class or race might shape the responses to these discourses. Interviews with academic staff may have more potential to explore these aspects, and in the next section, I explain the strengths and limitations of this element of the research design.

### 2.4.2   Research Methods

The two main research methods that I used in the collection and analysis of the data were discourse analysis and interviewing. Both methods are key strategies in linguistic ethnographic research. Discourse analysis includes a huge range of techniques ranging from psycholinguistic positivist approaches through to literary poststructuralist analyses. Taylor (2001, p.5) defines discourse analytic research as the 'close study of language in use' and suggests that it can be more accurately and usefully defined as a field of research rather than a unified research method or single approach. She identifies four different approaches: a focus on the language itself, a focus on how the language is used, identifying patterns of use in specific contexts, and analysing how language is constitutive of social practices or identities. It is this fourth approach that is most closely aligned with the conceptual basis of academic literacies and linguistic ethnography, and which provides the framework of analysis in this study. This approach to discourse and to discourse analysis is discussed in Chapter 3 which deals with institutional discourses on feedback and assessment.

Interviewing is a central strategy through which to provide the ethnographic context, to clarify observations that have been made in the course of fieldwork, to provide a participant's perspective on a particular phenomenon under investigation, or to provide additional information about the cultural of social context of the research. Interviews can also be used as indirect evidence of informants' attitudes or perceptions or as a source of evidence of the interactions between interviewer and informant which have produced the data (Hammersley, 2003). In linguistic

ethnography, this attention to the context in which texts are produced and constructed is a crucial aspect of avoiding the over-essentialising of the text that may be characteristic of other forms of discourse analysis.

There has been an increase in the use of interviews in academic writing research as the focus has shifted towards studying text in context (Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001). This shift, has, Lillis (2008) suggests, resulted in the epistemological function of interviewing within ethnography becoming  confused or unclear. She has noted a tendency in ethnographically based academic writing research to treat talk and talk about texts as having different epistemological status. Whilst texts are treated as a social construction, talk is often afforded a more transparent or realist status. Thus research participants' insights offered through interview or discussion are considered to provide an insight into motivation, behaviour or the authentic self rather than subjected to the same scrutiny as textual data. The suggestion is that the interview has become privileged as a mechanism for capturing voice and truth and, indeed, Atkinson and Silverman (1997, p.305) coined the term 'the interview society' to refer to the ubiquity of the interview in post-modern society for constructing self-narrative.

Lillis (2008) proposes a more theoretically informed and analytically sophisticated approach to ethnographic interviews which explicitly distinguishes between the different ways of conceptualising talk around academic texts. This threefold typology includes transparent/referential, discourse/indexical and performative/relational functions. The transparent/referential approach is, she suggests, the level at which insider accounts provide a perspective on the texts that they have produced and the contextual practices in which they are located. The second is at the discursive or indexical level, which indicates specific discourses about the self, writing, academia and so on. At the third, performative/relational level, talk about texts can be viewed as located within a specific socio-cultural perspective. Interviews, for example, can be understood as a co-construction between the researcher and the researched, themselves located within particular contexts and shaped by the dynamics of relational power and identity. This typology has the advantage of rejecting an overly simplistic approach to interview data whilst avoiding an entirely constructivist approach which

questions the value of interviews in providing anything other than evidence about the interactions between interviewer and informant.

In reviewing the interview schedule and in analysing the data that I collected, it is evident that my interviews, at least in the early stages, were conducted at the level which Lillis terms transparent/referential. I had envisaged the feedback given on student work as the source through which I would index aspects of the wider institutional and disciplinary contexts and explore how staff positioned themselves within these discourses. In contrast, I had seen the interviews as providing largely 'factual' information about the marker, the unit and the assessment, to assist in the process of making sense of the feedback data. In the earlier stages of the research process, my questions therefore invited a realist account of the writing and feedback practices on a specific unit, suggesting a positivist perspective in which interviews are viewed as transparent accounts of reality. As the interviews progressed however, I was conscious of my epistemological perspective shifting towards a more poststructuralist perspective which viewed the interview as discursive.

My initial realist/positivist approach to the interviewing made analysis of the interviews at the discourse/referential level problematic. However, from the evidence of the later interviews, it was clear that this was a potentially productive avenue for investigation. There is clearly scope in future research to integrate the analysis of textual and interview data more fully, for example, by using interviews with staff to explore the specific feedback that they have given to students on a particular piece of work. This is discussed at more length in the final chapter.

### 2.4.3   Data Analysis

Thorne (2000, p.68) describes the process of data analysis as 'the most complex and mysterious of all the stages of a qualitative project' and it is certainly the most opaque in many written accounts of research projects. Qualitative research in general, and ethnographic research in particular, tends to be recursive in nature and hence the distinction between the data collection and analysis stages is a somewhat artificial one. An ethnographic approach to data analysis involves identifying themes,

generating theories and then exploring these through additional data analysis (Mason, 2002; Walford, 2009). In this project, the process of data analysis had three strands. The first was a review of the institutional policies and procedures on feedback and assessment and of the unit handbooks and guidance relating to the undergraduate criminology curriculum. The second was the analysis of the data from interviews which were carried out between January 2007 and September 2009. The third was the transcribing and analysis of the feedback on student work. Each of the three strands overlapped, increasingly so as the research progressed. For example, the emerging themes from the feedback data and provisional theorising of the data were discussed in some of the later interviews.

All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by a digital transcription service. The transcribed data from the interviews was analysed using NVivo, computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) which can assist in the process of organising data and identifying related themes. The impact of technology on the process of collecting and analysing data has been explored in some depth in the methodological literature (García-Horta & Guerra-Ramos, 2009). Opinions differ on the extent to which recording devices, transcription software and qualitative data analysis software assist or interfere with the relationship between the researcher, the researched and the research. Whilst the software is clearly helpful in managing data, avoiding data overload and automating routine coding tasks, there is an argument that computers technologise research and remove the human, reflexive, element which is an essential part of qualitative research (Seror, 2005). CAQDAS, in particular, has been the subject of considerable discussion in relation to a perceived industrialisation or commodification of the craft of research (Coffey, Holbrook, & Atkinson, 1996; Jack & Westwood, 2006).

At the outset of the research process, my inclination was to take as much advantage as possible of the software that was available to assist in the management of the data. Although I was aware of the potential issues in relation to the accuracy and reliability of transcribed interviews, I felt that the use of the hard copy transcript coupled with listening and re-listening of the relevant excerpts was a sufficient precaution.

However, at a linguistic ethnography research seminar which compared different transcripts of the same event, I had the unsettling experience of not hearing a voice which had not been transcribed. Only on the second listening, and with reference to an alternative transcription, did I hear a background conversation which had been ignored by the first transcriber. This was rather a literal illustration of Althusser's (2006) notion of subjects being interpellated or called into being through discourse. It also made the point that tools of data collection and analysis, like the tools of writing and representation which form the subject of this study, are not neutral technologies and that considerable attention should be paid to their impact or potential impact on the research and its outcomes.

Partly as a consequence of this experience, I transcribed the written feedback on student work myself and also used manual coding and analysis techniques before transferring the data to NVivo. However, even manual coding was computer assisted as it involved the transfer of written comments into a word processing package and the use of word search and highlighting functions. Using a computer to assist in the analysis of data as opposed to the use of a dedicated CAQDAS package may therefore be a matter of degree rather than a qualitative difference. The important distinction may lie not so much in the use of a computer or of a particular type of software but in the extent to which CAQDAS and other computer and digital technology can potentially afford a lesser degree of immersion in the data than analogue means require.

In terms of the analysis of the data itself, I drew on a number of approaches in the broad linguistic ethnographic tradition. Lillis (2008, p.373) suggests that, by linking the textual approach of linguistic approaches to analysis of data with more contextually sensitive ethnographic approaches, linguistic ethnography affords an opportunity to 'bridge the ontological gap between text and context' that characterises some of the academic literacies research. The first stage involved an analysis of genre. The purpose of genre analysis is to look at the communicative intent and functions of particular textual products and to relate to wider social contexts and processes (Swales, 1990). Through an analysis of specific linguistic and rhetorical features, it is argued, it is

possible to identify the way that specific discourse communities work (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Saunders & Clarke, 1997). Chapter 3 considers the generic features of institutional policies and their connection with wider educational policy discourses and Chapters 4 and 5 examine how the particular discoursal features of written feedback are shaped by institutional, disciplinary and pedagogical practices and how they position writers of that feedback.

The second stage of the analysis was to look at specific examples of feedback given by staff to students. The transcribed comments on coversheets and on scripts were initially coded at the transparent/referential level by looking for specific examples in the text where staff made a comment about a student's writing. This produced a number of issues, such as the use of sources, referencing, and use of the first person which had been identified in the text. A second round of coding was at the discursive/indexical level and was concerned with identifying linguistic or discoursal features of the text which illustrated wider discourses about the institution, the discipline or the self. This micro-level of analysis is usually associated with conversation analysts, ethnomethodology and linguistic research but in linguistic ethnography it is not an end in itself but rather the starting point for an examination of the social, cultural and political contexts in which these interactions take place.

## 2.5    Methodological Considerations

### 2.5.1   Ontological and Epistemological Issues

Before I embarked on the professional doctorate programme, I had not given much thought to my ontological or epistemological perspectives on research. Neither my undergraduate degree in law nor my postgraduate degree in legal studies had included a research methods or methodology component. The research projects that I had worked on after graduation did not explicitly engage with issues of epistemology or ontology, although in retrospect, I can see that their research strategies were embedded in realist or positivist assumptions. In the assignments undertaken during the first year of the professional doctorate programme, I tried to rethink some of these assumptions; for example, by exploring the extent to which the interview data I had collected was a co-construction between my informants and myself (Creaton, 2006b).

However, the review of the academic writing literature undertaken for my CAS (Creaton, 2007) identified critiques from a range of diverse perspectives – poststructuralism, ethnography, sociology of scientific knowledge, feminism and new literacy studies – which involved a more concerted challenge to realism. These approaches challenged academic writing as the 'natural means for the expression of truth and knowledge' (Scollon & Scollon, 1981, p.44) and located academic writing or 'essayist literacy' (Trimbur, 1990) as a culturally and historically specific form of rhetorical practice rooted in the Enlightenment (Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Street, 2004). These critiques were essentially epistemological in nature, in that they challenged the textual embodiment of the empiricist and positivist movement which constituted knowledge as objective, universal and uncontested. However, some went further in presenting an ontological challenge to realism by rejecting the notion that there was a real world that was capable of being represented through writing.

This strong social constructivist position is particularly evident in poststructuralism. In poststructuralist theory, discourses are situated and performative. That is, discourses represent particular systems of power and knowledge which are open to contestation, but they are also constitutive of both society and the self (Foucault, 1972). Poststructuralist critiques of writing therefore challenge both the notion of writing as an unproblematic representation of the real, and the ontological claim to the notion of reality that underpins it. Given that there are multiple interpretations and representations through which meaning can be made, what comes to get written can be seen as a matter of power rather than of truth. These analyses also reject the distinction between representation and reality that underpin the ontological status of essayist literacy's claims to knowledge. All texts can be seen as contested and contingent claims to knowledge and are open to deconstruction. Hence the claim that 'there is nothing outside of the text' (Derrida, 1976, p.158).

Although both academic literacies and linguistic ethnography are influenced by poststructuralism, neither necessarily requires a concomitant commitment to a strong programme of social constructionism. The work of Lillis (2001, 2003) and Ivanic (1998),

for example, could be aligned with the critical theory perspective of Fairclough (1992, 2001) and other critical discourse analysts (Kress, 1990; Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2004), which is intended to uncover sources of real inequality and oppression. Sealey (2007) also makes the case that a linguistic ethnographic approach is compatible with a critical realist perspective.

Critical realism suggests that there is a 'real' world, but that our knowledge and understanding of that world is socially constructed. It therefore rejects the conflation of ontology and epistemology, which Bhaskar calls an 'epistemic fallacy' (1998, p.28). This allows for stratified ontology which differentiates between the empirical (things that can be experienced), the actual (events that happen regardless of whether they are experienced), and the real (generative mechanisms that are independent both of mind and society). Although Sealey's (2007) argument that critical realism is a fruitful theoretical resource for linguistic ethnography is convincing, there are a number of potential tensions between critical realism and the poststructuralist aspects of linguistic ethnography's heritage. Critical realism, for example, conceptualises structure and agency as distinct, albeit interdependent, domains which can be analysed separately (Archer, 2000). Poststructuralism, in contrast, has been criticised for its inadequate theorisation, or even denial of agency. These tensions are explored in the final two chapters of the thesis.

### 2.5.2 Macro-political and Micro-political Issues

A commitment to a particular ontological and epistemological stance has micro-political consequences. In acknowledging that claims to knowledge are socially constructed and based on partial and situated accounts, it follows that the question of researcher identity is foregrounded: 'the presence of the researcher, with the usual complement of human attributes can't be avoided' (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p.150). It therefore becomes necessary for the researcher to situate themselves in the knowledge production process and to reflect upon the effect of their presence on the collection and interpretation of the data. The need for reflexivity is particularly evident in relation to a professional doctorate where the emphasis is on researching in the context of professional practice. Bourdieu (1988, p.1) notes that in choosing to study a

social world in which we are ourselves located, there are 'special difficulties involved first in breaking with inside experience and then in reconstituting the knowledge which has been obtained by means of this break'. This requires trying to make the familiar strange, to problematise taken-for-granted concepts and to theorise one's own practice.

This reflexivity includes a consideration of how to write about the research. As was noted earlier, this is not a new dilemma for ethnographers. The 'crisis of representation' raised difficult questions about how research accounts were constructed and the narrative techniques that were employed to represent the researcher and the researched. However, given that the substantive focus of the thesis is the norms and conventions of academic writing, there is perhaps a particular irony in using a conventional academic narrative to deconstruct the rhetorical strategies embedded within an academic text. This thesis clearly follows the generic conventions of academic writing in its structure, organisation and tone. Whilst I appear as an explicit presence in parts of the study to demonstrate an appropriate degree of reflexivity and some metanarrative commentary, I generally assume the stance of a neutral narrator rather than a partial and situated observer.

Some writers have attempted to resist or subvert prevailing conventions imposed by conventional academic literacy, through exploring different forms of representation of knowledge. Poststructuralist feminists, such as Cixous (1994), Kristeva (1984) and Irigaray (Whitford, 1991) have promoted *l'écriture feminine,* or women's writing, as an alternative writing practice. Some of this work uses non-linear, experimental forms of writing to try and transcend existing language structures and conventions and to express the openness and multivocality of the text. Strategies for including a plurality of voices have also been employed by sociologists of scientific knowledge, who have used parallel narratives, a dialogue between the author as commentator on the text, a play, fictional dialogues, debates and discussions (Ashmore, 1989). Other forms of experimental writing include autoethnography, ethnodrama, poetry, plays (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and fictional representations of research (Ketelle, 2004; Sparkes, 2002).

Whilst I have attempted to take a reflexive approach to my research and to interrogate some of the assumptions that underpin how the work has been represented, I have not followed Ashmore's (1989) lead in subverting the genre of the academic thesis. I have several justifications for doing so. The first is that subversions of genre, once copied and repeated, quickly become established as new genres with their own set of conventions. The second is that I am conscious of the risks of writing outside the boundaries established by the specific educational and institutional context in which I am located, particularly in such a high-stakes piece of assessment A doctoral thesis is not simply the demonstration of discipline-specific knowledge, but the representation of that knowledge through the norms and conventions characteristic of that disciplinary culture, and that remains the case even where the substantive focus of the thesis is academic writing practices.

In making the decision to conform to the established norms and conventions as I have understood them to be, I have found Srivastava's (2006, p.211) notion of 'research currencies' helpful in justifying this pragmatic approach. She uses the term to describe 'a medium of exchange to achieve temporary shared positionalities'. In this sense I am using writing as a medium of exchange, whilst recognising it as socially constructed even though the reader or writer 'can accept or reject aspects of those mediated constructs' (Srivastava, 2006, p.219).

### 2.5.3   Practical and Ethical Issues

The practical aspects of negotiating access to the research site were relatively straightforward given my insider status within the institution. By reviewing samples which were made available to the external examiner and filed as part of the unit management process I was able to focus on data that were naturally occurring, already transcribed and did not require special access arrangements. The Head of Department granted me permission to look at the samples in my capacity as a researcher rather than as a member of staff. Interviews with members of staff were negotiated via email and all staff consented to be interviewed and recorded. The majority of the institutional documentation I used was publicly available on the university website.

Departmental policies, procedures and forms were accessed via the university's virtual learning environment which provided access to these policies for all registered students. The lack of practical obstacles reflects one of the oft stated advantages of insider research, that is, it bypasses some of the usual problems that ethnographers might face in negotiating access. In this case, access was probably facilitated by the interest in the potential of the research to directly inform professional practice. As was noted in Chapter 1, student writing, feedback, marking and assessment are high profile issues within higher education and many staff seemed happy to contribute to research which might provide insights into how staff engagement with student writing practices might be enhanced.

These practical advantages of conducting insider research are, however, offset by some of the particularly difficult ethical issues relating to consent, deception and confidentiality that might arise (Mercer, 2007). In identifying these ethical issues, however, it is important to acknowledge Merton's view that a researcher has multiple identities, which position the researcher differently in terms of insider/outsider status (Merton, 1972). Furthermore, Mercer makes the point that the researcher's relationship with the researched is fluid and contingent, it 'fluctuates constantly, shifting back and forth along a continuum of possibilities, from one moment to the next, from one location to the next, from one interaction to the next and even from one discussion topic to the next' (Mercer, 2007, p.13).

In my position as a manager-academic with responsibility for quality assurance there were a number of issues to consider, which I have explored in previous assignments (Creaton, 2006a, 2006c). In addition to being sensitive to the power relationships involved between myself and other members of staff, there are potential dilemmas in identifying information in my capacity as a researcher that have implications in terms of quality assurance. Some of these ethical issues were at least partially sidestepped, or perhaps deferred, through my secondment to a central department in January 2009 for a period of three years. Although I maintained some teaching and research connections with ICJS, I gave up all my quality assurance duties. This had the advantage of enabling the boundaries between my identities as researcher and

member of staff to be delineated more distinctly, although, of course, I remain an insider within the institution itself.

Nevertheless, a number of the ethical difficulties inherent in undertaking ethnography within my own field of professional practice remained. These included negotiating the researcher/member boundaries when engaged in informal and unplanned conversations about marking or routine activities such as assessment meetings. Although members of staff were aware that I was undertaking doctoral research in this area, and many of them had participated in formal interviews, they were not necessarily expecting less formal interactions to form part of my research data. I tried to negotiate this difficult boundary through conceptualising the knowledge and insights as having a hermeneutic rather than an epistemological function, that is, I used them as aids to understanding rather than primary sources of data. Nevertheless, some of these conversations sparked particularly helpful insights or lines of enquiry, and, in these situations, I expressly drew attention to the potential relevance that they might have in relation to my doctoral work.

One final ethical issue relates to the naming of the department and the institution in the thesis. Anonymity has become the default position in educational and social research, which presents a particular problem for insider researchers and ethnographers. The most common solution is to provide a pseudonym for the institution and to give information that is sufficiently ambiguous to leave at least some room for doubt as to its identity. This maintains a convenient fiction that is similar to that employed in relation to anonymous peer review. Information included in the text provides all sorts of clues that enable the reader to identify the author or the institution with a reasonable degree of certainty, but without the explicit confirmation in the text.

However, this approach is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it requires the writer to adopt an institutional version of writing in the third person, in that the institution must be written about as if the writer was not located within it. This involves more than simply providing a convenient pseudonym, it involves an explicit distancing of the

self from the institutional context and a misrepresentation of the relationship between the research and the researched. Whilst this approach may be justified where it is necessary to avoid harm to individuals or the institution, it needs to be acknowledged that the decision is not simply a semantic one, but one that has potentially profound methodological implications. A second objection is raised by Walford (2005), who argues that research participants should have more autonomy over the nature and extent of disclosures. The presumption in favour of anonymity may derive in part from the dominance of the medical ethical discourse, which is concerned primarily with protecting patients from physical harm. Macfarlane (2008) argues instead for a different conceptualisation of ethics, in which the values and ethics of the researcher are prioritised.

Drawing on these principles, I have chosen, following advice from the University of Portsmouth Research Ethics Committee, and with the agreement of the Head of Department, to name the department and the institution in the text. I have however, retained the anonymity which I promised to the individual members of staff who were interviewed for the project. The ethical issues in relation to the samples of student work were slightly more complex to negotiate. The samples of student work were signed by the marker and the mark verifier and I was unsure whether I needed permission from each of the markers in order to transcribe the feedback and to use it in my sample. Although samples of student work may be accessed by a range of people as part of internal and quality assurance procedures, staff would not necessarily have consented to this documentation being used for research purposes. In order to sidestep some of the difficulties that obtaining consent might cause, I followed the advice of a member of the Research Ethics Committee to anonymise the work before transcription, and a member of the administrative staff redacted the names on the assessment coversheets before forwarding them to me.

The decision to anonymise the scripts was a particularly interesting example of how the competing ontological, epistemological, ethical, macro-political, micro-political and practical issues identified by Dunne, et al. (2005) are intertwined. At the time, this decision appeared to be a largely practical one, which would bypass a potentially

lengthy period of obtaining consent. In epistemological terms, I felt able to justify this approach on the basis that the focus of my research was primarily on the texts, rather than on the individuals who had produced the texts. However, on further reflection, I can see how my decision was also perhaps informed by a continuing attachment to some of the assumptions underpinning positivist research. Giving markers the chance to opt out would potentially diminish the size and composition of the sample and compromise the 'representativeness' and 'validity' of my research. The choices that I made at this point also had wider methodological and theoretical implications at later stages of the thesis. For example, I identified some of the discourses in the institutional documentation and in the analysis of the feedback as having a gendered dimension, but the lack of information about the social identity of the markers meant that I could not explore the different ways in which male or female markers invoked these discourses.

I will discuss this specific issue in more depth later in the thesis, but as an example of the complex interactions between methodological and theoretical considerations, this is a useful point at which to conclude this chapter. As I explained in the introductory paragraphs, I have aimed to provide a clear rationale for the decisions that I made in the course of the research, whilst explicating some of the unresolved tensions and unexpected consequences which ensued. Some of these tensions and consequences are revisited in the next three chapters, in which I move on to focus on the substantive findings of the research and a discussion of their implications.

# CHAPTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSES

In the academic literacies framework, a close study of the institutional context is crucial to an understanding of everyday literacy practices at the local level, because institutions are 'constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power' (Lea & Street, 1998, p.159). This approach draws on poststructuralist understandings of discourse, in which language is central to meaning making, subject formation and knowledge construction. Rather than simply providing a transparent representation of the social world, discourses construct and regulate what can be known, done and said in specific institutional contexts. This chapter begins with a more detailed overview of the poststructuralist concept of discourse and then considers how this has informed different approaches to discourse analysis. It then analyses relevant institutional documentation with the aim of identifying the key discourses that frame student writing and the feedback given on it.

## 3.1    Discourse

Mills (2004, p.1) suggests that the concept of discourse has perhaps the 'widest range of possible significations of any term in literary and cultural theory'. In linguistics, the term can be used to denote language in use or a series of verbal or written interactions. However, in social and cultural theory, the term has come to signify a much wider and more complex concept, which goes beyond text and into the realm of social practice. Foucault (1972) argues that discourses are a series of representations or practices through which meanings are produced and legitimated and which represent particular systems of power and knowledge. Discourse in this context is not simply language, but 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p.49). These practices produce knowledge, make meaning and regulate behaviour within particular social, historical and cultural locations. Discourse is therefore centrally implicated in the exercise of power. Hegemonic discourses establish ways of seeing and being in the world which become natural and taken for granted and may reinforce particular patterns of power and privilege.

Foucault's understanding of discourse and discursive practices has been developed in subsequent poststructuralist writings. Poststucturalism shares with postmodernism a dismissal of the search for universal theories or universal truth, a scepticism towards the status of knowledge and epistemological claims, and a concern with problematising and disrupting conventional ways of seeing and understanding the world. Both approaches also dispute reductionist and essentialist explanations of the social world and emphasise the complexity, multiplicity and fluidity of power, identity and knowledge. However, there are two key distinctions. The first is the response to the philosophical crisis that these challenges to modernity provoke. Whilst postmodernism has been associated with an 'apolitical pluralism' (Hughes, 1995, p.219), poststructuralism leaves open the possibility of resistance to hegemonic discourses.

The second key distinction is that poststructuralism places more emphasis on the central role of language in the social construction of reality. A key feature of poststructuralist analysis is therefore the deconstruction of texts. Primarily associated with Derrida (1976), deconstructionist approaches have been particularly concerned with the critique of binary oppositions which were central to structuralist accounts of the social world. These oppositional categories are considered to be problematic because such binaries are often essentialist and reductionist, reducing complex configurations of variables into either/or formulations. Furthermore, setting up these categories as binary opposites reinforces social patterns of difference and dominance which may underpin the linguistic categories. A central task for deconstructionism is therefore undermining the boundaries between the binaries and emphasising complexities, ambiguities and contradictions in texts.

The implications of these philosophical perspectives in educational research are explored in some depth in the works of Maclure (2003) and Usher and Edwards (1994). Maclure (2003), for example, uses poststructuralist concepts of discourse to deconstruct a variety of educational texts and to make visible the issues of power and identity in which they are implicated. Usher and Edwards' (1994) work explores the implications of postmodernist approaches for established educational concepts. For these authors,

taking a postmodern or poststructuralist perspective locates educational practice in the context of wider institutional and policy discourses, which can lead to the challenging of established paradigms and the disruption of dominant discourses about learning, teaching and the curriculum. It may focus attention on the relationship between discourse and institutional practices, that is, how discourses are implicated in the legitimation and reinforcement of particular social or institutional structures (Willig, 1999, p.173). A deconstructionist approach may also identify gaps and absences and foreground the peripheral features of a text as a means of locating hidden meanings or subversive readings.

In the academic literacies model, normative approaches to student writing are challenged and the question of what constitutes appropriate academic writing re-examined. Lillis (2001), for example, suggests that academic writing practices reflect a particular form of privileged discourse, which has, through the hegemonic power that academics exercise in the field of knowledge production, become established as the natural discourse of the communication of ideas within the academic environment. This discourse excludes certain types of knowledge and experience from the academy and therefore marginalises certain groups of students who come from non-traditional backgrounds. By locating the deficit within individual students, institutional discourses work to maintain existing hierarchies. What is perhaps less clear in the existing research literature, however, is the role of academic staff in producing and reproducing these discourses through their pedagogical practices.

### 3.2    Discourse Analysis

In poststructuralist discourse analysis, the role of discourse is a central explanatory construct in framing what can be said, by whom, and in what circumstances. An understanding of discourse which is informed by poststructuralism therefore leads to a methodological approach that is primarily concerned with interrogating texts and unpacking discourses to expose the mechanisms of social and cultural construction. Although writers such as Foucault and Derrida provided a broad theoretical account of the production of discourses and how these might be deconstructed, neither provided much detailed insight into the methodological means by which this might be achieved.

Indeed, Luke (1997, p.52) suggests that both 'assiduously avoided offering more than broad theoretical directions for the study of discourse in specific local institutions'.

Foucault's (1972) approach to discourse can be described as genealogical, in that his work involved tracing the emergence of major discourses through an eclectic mix of historical sources. Subsequent discourse analysis in the Foucauldian tradition interrogates the 'relationship between discourse and how people think or feel (subjectivity), what they may do (practices) and the material conditions in which such experiences may take place' (Willig, 1999, p.173). Derrida (1976), however, was more concerned with the linguistic features of texts. His approach proceeds from the Saussurian position that language is not referential (that is, it does not map to specific manifestations of reality) but acquires its meaning through relationships with other words and meanings (de Saussure, Bally, & Sechehaye, 1983). His analysis of texts therefore sought to reveal the underlying discourses which structure language and behaviour and to demonstrate how facts and issues that are taken for granted are in fact situated, partial and constructed.

Within these two very broad potential approaches, a number of techniques and methods have been applied to the analysis of discourse, particularly as the 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences has led to an increasing interest in discourse and discourse analysis across a range of disciplines. Whilst there is no single poststructuralist method in the considerable body of literature that draws on Foucault and Derrida's work, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has emerged as a popular methodological frame. CDA shares with poststructuralism a concern with the hegemonic power of language and exploring how ideologies are produced and reproduced through discursive practices. In Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of discourse, texts are inextricably linked to and situated by the processes through which they have been produced and consumed (referred to by Fairclough as 'discourse practice'). These processes are further embedded in the wider institutional and socio-historical social context (which he terms 'social practice'). Using Fairclough's model, any example of writing can be analysed at the three levels in the model: at the level of written text, at the level of discourse practice and at the level of social practice.

Although clearly influenced by a poststructuralist perspective in its understanding of the constitutive power of discourse and in its objective to challenge hegemonic thinking and disrupt dominant paradigms, CDA can be distinguished by its more explicitly neo-Marxist and critical perspective. Firstly, discourses are assumed to serve an ideological function which is primarily class-based. Secondly, the purpose of discourse analysis is understood to have a constructive as well as a deconstructive function. By making explicit the underlying patterns of power and ideology which underpin apparently neutral and transparent language, critical discourse analysts intend that those patterns can be addressed and transformed through action. These features presuppose a particular conception of power as a more unidirectional and fixed entity than the fluid and distributed version proposed by Foucault. As CDA has become more broadly used in social research, Van Dijk (2001) suggests that neo-Marxist perspectives have been increasingly replaced by other theoretical influences such as Habermas, Bourdieu and Giddens.

From the methodological perspective, critiques of both CDA and poststructuralist discourse analysis have centred on the tendency of critical discourse analysts to over-essentialise the text and to over-privilege the interpretation of the researcher (Hammersley, 1997; Luke, 1997). Whilst some CDA does draw on other semiotic resources and/or supplement textual analysis with elements of ethnographic or other empirical research, other work does focus almost entirely on the text as the meaning making resource. This exclusion of other contextual resources enables the discourse analyst to provide a reading of the text based on their own privileged hermeneutic insight without reference to the perspectives of the persons involved in the production of the text. Although Fairclough's (1992) model requires close attention to be paid to the conditions of production and consumption of the text, this is not necessarily done with reference to the producers or the consumers (Potter, 1996).

Some CDA texts can also be criticised for engaging in the same sort of rhetorical strategies that are employed by the very texts that they are analysing. The research is written as a realist narrative which employs the conventions such as the absence of the author from the text and an 'interpretive omnipotence' (Van Maanen, 1988, p.51)

in which the author assumes the stance of a neutral narrator directly reporting on events rather than a partial and situated observer. By using this device, 'the narrator's authority is apparently enhanced, and audience worries over personal subjectivity become moot' (Van Maanen, 1988, p.46). The author of the realist tale also uses the same 'god trick' (Haraway, 1988) as that pulled by the author of the conventional scientific tale – the narrative is constructed in such a way as to present the research process and the findings as the sole authentic version.

A linguistic ethnographic approach to discourse analysis cannot claim to sidestep these problems entirely. Whilst writing remains the primary medium through which research findings are communicated and discussed within the academy, it is difficult to avoid the power relations inherent in the production and authority of written texts. However, a linguistic ethnographic approach can perhaps go some way towards both countering the measure of interpretive omnipotence that might infuse research which over-essentialises text as the sole mechanism through which culture is produced. The ethnographic sensibility provides the commitment to an exploration of the contexts in which the texts are produced and the accounts of those who are involved in the co-production of the texts. Although the researcher remains the primary mechanism for the collection and interpretation of the data, the use of a wider range of data and perspectives provides the opportunity for a more nuanced account. It is also important, however, for the discourse analyst to recognise that the identification and analysis of discourses is itself a situated process. Sunderland (2004, p.47) suggests that this can be addressed through explicitness in the research about the evidence which supports the naming of specific discourses, presenting the named discourses up for scrutiny and a degree of reflexivity about the researcher's own perspective. In the analysis of the institutional policies on assessment, marking and feedback that follows, I have endeavoured to incorporate these principles of transparency, accountability and reflexivity.

## 3.3    Institutional Policies on Assessment, Marking and Feedback

The institutional expectations in relation to feedback are set out in the University's *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2008–12* which places an emphasis on

ensuring that 'students receive, and act on, timely, useful feedback on formative and summative assessments' (University of Portsmouth, 2008, p.8). These expectations are translated into the detailed requirements of the *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students* (University of Portsmouth, 2009a). The Code is based on six key principles: that assessment will be valid in relation to its form, quantity, level, content and learning outcomes; facilitative and support and promote student learning by the provision of appropriate feedback on students' performance; explicit with all parts of the assessment process being made clear to all parties; reliable, consistent and reproducible in the judgements made; equitable with all students being assessed fairly on their own individual merit and ability; and just with clearly documented procedures to support this. A final principle is that the policy and processes of assessment will be subject to regular monitoring and review.

These institutional principles are themselves based on the *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students* (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2006). This Code of Practice is expressed as a statement of good practice, but, as part of the audit procedure, institutions are expected to take account of the Code and precepts and therefore many institutions' codes, the University of Portsmouth included, have fairly explicit echoes of that text in their own institutional policies. There are other manifestly intertextual references in the Code. It is said to link with, and complement, the principles enshrined within other University of Portsmouth policy statements, including: guidance on producing programme specifications, the Curricular Framework and the Retention Policy. The university-wide guidance is also supplemented by, and interpreted through, documentation produced by individual departments. For example, ICJS has its own students' feedback charter which sets out a list of rights and responsibilities for both the students and the department. The Code is also translated at a unit level into the assessment requirements for each unit which are published in a unit handbook or on the internet.

Given the central role of the Code of Practice in setting out the institutional policy framework within which feedback practices are located, an analysis of its textual and discursive features provides a useful starting point for the exploration of the macro-

level contexts in which feedback practices are situated. This discourse analysis starts with a focus on the text itself to look at how the document is framed and the linguistic choices that are used to accomplish this. The textual macrostructure of the documentation can indicate something about the underlying assumptions that underpin the production of the text, in terms of how the document is organised and the elements of the text which are highlighted. It can also be indicative of genre, that is: 'Conventionalised expectations that members of a social group or network use to shape and construe the communicative activity that they are engaged in' (Rampton, 2006, p.128). Texts within a genre can share a similar look or feel, a similar structure or sequencing or similar 'moves' which make them recognisable as a particular type of document and which enable the reader to locate them within, or in relation to, other documentation in that category.

The Code is clearly identifiable as a University of Portsmouth policy document because of the corporate branding that is used for all formal institutional level policy documentation. The second page includes a standard template which notes information about the document author and department, the responsible person and department, the approving body, date of approval, review date, edition number and ID code. It also indicates whether the document is for public access online or for staff access only, and contact details for queries or for obtaining the document in an alternative format. Through the information provided here, the document references its compliance with the university regulatory framework and governance, and the external requirements of the freedom of information and data protection legislation. The named author is located within the Quality Management Division of the Academic Registry and is not an academic member of staff, indicating that the primary function of the document is a quality assurance rather than pedagogical one. However, the approving body is the Academic Policy Committee, which includes a majority of academic staff representatives. Stakeholder buy-in is also demonstrated in the introduction which notes that the principles contained in the documentation are reviewed in consultation with groups of staff and students from across the University.

There are a number of intertextual references in the documentation, but these are to other internal quality assurance related policies, including the *Template for Programme Specifications*, *External Examiners Regulations and Procedures*, *Examination and Assessment Regulations* and the *Retention Policy for Student and Course Records* – or to external quality assurance bodies such as the QAA and the South England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer. These references can be seen as a chain of intertextuality through which the institution makes an explicit response to previous texts (such as the QAA Code of Practice) and anticipates others – future QAA audits, for example. There are no references to any academic literature or to the pedagogical principles underpinning them – and so the nature and choice of references reinforces the positioning of the document clearly within a quality assurance rather than pedagogical genre.

The choice of text and format is clearly official and formal. The use of headings, numbered sections, bullet points, figures, tables and appendices echo a scientific or business report. The authoritative nature of the document is reinforced by several rhetorical devices, including nominalisations, the use of the passive tense and the third person, which work to promote a tone of objectivity and authority. Hyland (2000, 2001, 2002b) suggests that the use of these particular linguistic forms is constituted by and through social and institutional practices within academic communities and show how assumptions, arguments and epistemological viewpoints are embedded in the textual fabric of the institution.

The modality of the verbs, that is, the certainty with which a particular idea is expressed, also reinforces the authority embedded within the document. The document employs 'will' rather than the more tentative 'should' in stating that the policies apply to all students registered on all programmes. Other sections are written using a mix of 'will ', 'must' and 'should'. However, the choice of the future simple tense throughout rather than a more directive 'must' provides the document with a somewhat aspirational tone, implying that the actions specified will occur in the future. One section of the document – the guidelines relating to maximum assessment load – is explicitly flagged up as not being prescriptive and these are labelled as

'indicative' assessment plans. However, if unit coordinators do propose an assessment load which is significantly out of line with the guidelines, they should be able to justify 'a case for deviation'(University of Portsmouth, 2009a, p.4). The use of this term, rather than a more neutral term such as 'exception' or 'departure', suggests that the guidelines are intended to have a more regulatory force than the document claims. In contrast, the regulatory status of the appendix that contains the generic grade criteria, which is presumably of far more immediate importance to staff and students, is left undefined.

## 3.4     Naming and Framing Institutional Discourses

The previous section has focussed primarily on the structural and linguistic elements of the Code to show how the choices that have been made about the organisation and presentation of the text can index some of the wider issues related to that text's production. The Code exhibits some of the features of the university policy documentation genre in terms of how it is constructed but also in terms of its function, which clearly positions it as a quality assurance rather than pedagogical document. To this extent, the analysis locates the document within a quality assurance or education policy discourse. However, Sunderland (2004) would identify this as a descriptive discourse – that is, it simply describes the type of genre to which the document belongs and the type of language that it uses. She distinguishes these sort of descriptive discourses from the naming of interpretive discourses, by which she means 'broad constitutive systems of meaning' or 'ways of seeing the world' (Sunderland, 2004, p.6) that is, the discourses by and through which subjects are formed and social worlds are ideologically constituted. This section examines some of the key interpretive discourses with the text.

### 3.4.1   Scientific Assessor

The first discourse that can be detected in the Code is one which constructs assessment as scientific – that is, as a rational, objective process carried out by a disinterested observer through the dispassionate application of standardised criteria. Two of the principles which underpin the assessment policy use explicitly scientific terminology. The first principle states that assessment 'will be valid in relation to its

form, quantity, level content and learning outcomes…' (University of Portsmouth, 2009a, p.4) and the fourth principle states that it will be 'reliable, consistent and reproducible in the judgements made' (University of Portsmouth, 2009a, p.4). Validity, reliability, reproducibility are all concepts which are derived from a positivist or empiricist epistemology. In this discourse, the concept of assessment is presented primarily as an exercise in the accurate grading of a student's performance, and is underpinned by behaviourist models which de-emphasise the element of subjectivity involved in the marking process.

The assumptions which underpin the scientific discourse are reinforced by two aspects of the assessment process – the requirement for anonymous marking and the mark verification procedure. The Code does not spell out the reason for anonymous marking, but the policy is set out under principle 5, which states that assessment processes 'will be equitable with all students being fairly assessed on their own individual merit or ability'. The assumption is that knowledge of a student's identity will compromise a fair assessment process, presumably this will result in unconscious or conscious bias. Later on in the Code there is reference to second marking or 'mark verification' in which a second member of staff scans the assessments to 'ascertain that the marks are broadly appropriate and have been fairly arrived at' (University of Portsmouth, 2009a, p.11). As with scientific discourse more generally, the use of this language imbues the process of assessment with the notion of reliability and objectivity and presents its processes and outcome as valid.

The scientific discourse is a dominant discourse both inside and outside the educational sphere, and social theorists have been particularly concerned with how scientific writing, texts and discourse construct ways of seeing and knowing about the world. In his study on asylums, for example, Foucault suggested that the scientific discourses which underpinned medicine and psychiatry positioned particular behaviour as illness and enabled medicalised subjects to be regulated through institutional technologies of power (Foucault & Khalfa, 2006). Sociologists of scientific knowledge have also interrogated the role of discourse in constructing scientific claims to knowledge, focussing on 'what comes to count as scientific knowledge and with

how it so comes to count' (H. Collins, 1983, p.267). Latour and Woolgar (1979) argued that scientists employed a range of rhetorical strategies in scientific texts which legitimised claims to scientific knowledge and asserted the cultural authority of that knowledge. Latour (1987) went on to extend his claims that text is central to the scientific enterprise, examining how narrative is used to establish and reinforce particular hegemonic positions.

For feminist writers, the emphasis within scientific discourse of rationality, objectivity and absence of the personal has gendered implications, insofar that these concepts and qualities can be associated with masculine ways of thinking. Spender (1985) argued that language encodes a male worldview, which normalises rational, linear, universal and objective argument as the hegemonic mode of discourse. This reflects dominant practices of knowledge production which privilege particular viewpoints and seek to totalise them. Feminist epistemologists have, however, argued that these viewpoints, and the knowledge that they create, are situated in the specific perspective of the subject (Haraway, 1988). Denying the situated nature of knowledge production and representation works in the interests of male hegemony and reinforces patriarchal structures. A scientist discourse promotes an ideology of objective assessment which reinforces masculinist performative neutrality and excludes the affective dimensions of assessment and feedback. Higgins, et al. (2001, p.272) note that 'the student makes an emotional investment in an assignment and expects some return on that investment' and that feedback can have a considerable impact on self-esteem, motivation and self-identity. Yet these aspects of feedback are largely ignored in the Code, even within the learning and teaching discourse discussed below.

### 3.4.2   Quality Assurance

The extent to which the imprint of the QAA Code of Practice is evident in the structure and framework of the local institutional documentation was noted earlier in the chapter, and there is evidence of a discourse of quality assurance and audit culture throughout the University of Portsmouth's Code of Practice. Principle 3 states that assessment processes 'will be explicit with all parts of the assessment process being made clear to all parties (students, staff and external examiners)' (University of

Portsmouth, 2009a, p.4). Principle 4 requires that processes be 'robust' and that there are clearly documented procedures to support this. Samples of examination scripts and coursework must be archived for at least four years in case they are required for quality assurance and monitoring purposes. Principle 7 states that the policies and processes of assessment will be monitored through annual departmental standards and quality review and through the University's Quality Assurance Committee.

The key features of the quality assurance discourse – explicitness, external monitoring, paperwork trails – which are evident here are familiar themes in the analysis of new managerialism and audit culture in higher education (Morley, 2003; Strathern, 2000). There is a strong emphasis in the quality assurance agenda of evidencing particular aspects of practice and demonstrating how criteria, aims and objectives have been met for the public gaze. This feeds into wider discourses about performativity and transparency which are characteristic of managerialism and neo-liberal discourse. Morley's (2003) work drew on her interviews with staff to show the impact of institutional quality assurance frameworks – but here we can see how these issues are constructed by and through an example of an institutional text.

A prominent theme in the quality assurance discourse is transparency, which requires that processes and procedures be made explicit. In the same way that the explicit articulation of the methodology of a scientific experiment is intended to allow the procedure to be repeated by another scientist with the same outcome, so, it is implied, can the explicit articulation of the assessment and grade criteria enable different markers to reach the same outcome. This emphasis on transparency reinforces the scientific discourse which has been identified elsewhere, but it is also a common feature of quality assurance practices and associated discourses. Yet, as Strathern (2000, p.309) points out, 'there is nothing innocent about making the invisible visible'. The 'tyranny of transparency' (Strathern, 2000, p.309) promises accountability but instead regulates and sanitises the tacit, messy processes of learning, teaching and assessment, equating performance indicators with the performance itself (Orr & Blythman, 2005). In assuming that language is transparent, attempts to make assessment criteria explicit are unsuccessful, because the assessment criteria and

learning outcomes themselves are written in a contextualised, tacit and situated discourse. Although this is a different genre to that of the discipline, it may be equally inaccessible to some students (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010).

Transparency is a key feature of the wider audit culture which has led Crook, Gross, and Dymott, (2006, p.98) to argue that there is an increasing preoccupation with form rather than content as organisations 'become overly-focused on creating the sort of rituals and instruments that allow their activities to be rendered "auditable"'. This emphasis on procedure and process has, they argue, led to an increasing industrialisation of assessment. Student-tutor and writer-reader relationships have become increasingly mediated through the third parties of technology, records and administrators, with the writing of the feedback on the script remaining the only point of personal interaction. This separation is exacerbated by the discouragement of forms of feedback that are not auditable. In the University of Portsmouth's Code of Practice, for example, oral feedback is permitted only as a supplement to the permanent record of the written feedback. Assessment and feedback has therefore become an increasingly textual activity, despite the advent of new and alternative forms of literacy practices and despite the evidence that technologies such as digital audio feedback may be more effective and efficient (Rotheram, 2008).

### 3.4.3   Learning and Teaching

A final key discourse that can be identified in the institutional policies relates to learning and teaching. For a document which is concerned with the assessment of students, there are relatively few references to terms such as 'learning', 'teaching', 'education' or 'knowledge'. In her discourse analysis of two assessment policies from an Australian university, Evans (2009, p.7) interpreted these absences as the 'silencing of education, learning and knowledge as governing concepts'. This, she suggests, follows from the displacement of academic professional judgement through a process of centralisation and bureaucratisation. At the University of Portsmouth, too, the Code draws primarily on managerialist rather than educational discourses and just one of the principles (principle 2) underpinning the Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students relates explicitly to student learning.

This principle states that assessment 'will be facilitative and support and promote student learning by the provision of appropriate feedback on students' performance' (University of Portsmouth, 2009a, p.4). This conceptualisation of feedback on student work as central to student learning draws on a number of wider educational discourses, many of which are oppositional to the behaviourist discourse which is evident elsewhere in the Code of Practice. As Ortlipp (2009) observes, learning and teaching discourses tend to have a humanist dimension, characterising education as emancipatory, progressive and holistic in nature. The use of the term 'learning' rather than 'teaching' in the Code evokes a constructivist view of education in which the resources for learning and development rest primarily in the student rather than in the teacher.

This discourse also references more recent educationalist debates about assessment in which assessment is *for* learning rather than *of* learning (Black, Harrison, & Lee, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 1998). This approach sees assessment as being fully integrated into curriculum design and delivery rather than a post learning event. Assessment for learning also suggests an emphasis on formative feedback which enables students to improve and enhance their subsequent performance rather than summative feedback which explains or justifies a judgement made about a student's achievement in a particular assessment. There is another potential tension here with the emphasis on validity, reliability and reproducibility elsewhere in the Code which seems to be more relevant to summative rather than formative assessment.

The principle that assessment will promote student learning by provision of appropriate feedback on students' performance is underpinned by a specific set of understandings of what constitutes constructive feedback, theories about how students learn, and research on the impact of feedback on student motivation. Research suggesting that students respond poorly to feedback that is perceived as being negative (Weaver, 2006) tends to draw on social cognitive models of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). These models suggest that students are more likely to be motivated if they hold a belief that they are capable of influencing their future performance. Whilst

negative feedback may weaken students' self-efficacy, more constructive feedback can motivate them.

This theoretical underpinning has led to the practice of the 'feedback sandwich', a phrase coined by Docheff (1990) specifically in relation to clinical teaching, but which has become pervasive in higher education and other contexts. Docheff's original model had three elements: reinforce the learner, inform the learner of a way to improve the skill and motivate the learner. By 'sandwiching' the giving of the key information about how to improve in between positive reinforcement strategies designed to increase the learner's self-efficacy, the intention was to deliver the best possible impact on the learner's subsequent behaviour and skill development. As the notion of the feedback sandwich has become more entrenched in a wider range of educational contexts, however, Docheff's model has become more widely interpreted as sandwiching negative feedback between two pieces of positive feedback.

It has been suggested that the sandwich method has become so familiar as a method of delivering negative feedback that receivers of feedback tend to hear any positive feedback as a prelude to criticism (Watkins, 2002, p.69), thus negating Docheff's intention that this should reinforce the learner. Even in the medical context in which it was first developed, researchers have recognised the limitations in dealing with complex or emotionally charged situations, and are seeking alternative models to deal with a more diverse range of circumstances (Milan, Parish, & Reichgott, 2006). However, the principles behind the model are embedded in the learning and teaching context at the University of Portsmouth. The *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students* (University of Portsmouth, 2009a, p.8) states that:

2.1.1 The minimum requirements for all feedback shall be:

- major strengths of the work;
- ways in which the mark could have been improved;
- original mark and any penalties that have been applied (where appropriate)

The minimum requirements set out in the Code might be more accurately described as an 'open sandwich' with the mark taking the place of the final positive note of encouragement.

The Code also recommends the use of a standard coursework sheet on which feedback should be given, although no specific guidance is given on the format of the sheet. The importance of this sheet should not be overlooked, however, because, in ICJS at least, this is a primary mechanism through which institutional policy on feedback and assessment is enacted. The coursework sheet institutionalises both the feedback sandwich formula as the preferred structure for delivering feedback but also a preferred type of vocabulary for delivering that feedback. This can be seen as an example of what Cameron refers to as 'verbal hygiene' or 'the idea that some ways of using language are functionally, aesthetically, or morally preferable to others' (Cameron, 1995, p.386). It might also be viewed as an example of a practice which formalises, or makes formulaic, the attention to the affective dimensions of providing feedback. The importance of the coversheet in mediating between institutional discourses and pedagogical practices is discussed in more depth in Chapter 5.

## 3.5    The Discursive Construction of Feedback

This chapter has analysed the institutional discourses in the *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students* as a starting point for exploring how feedback practices are situated and constructed within the University of Portsmouth. Although the guidelines, charters, codes and policies of an institution do not necessarily (as will be seen in Chapter 4) determine the pedagogical practices of academic staff, these institutional texts do provide the framework of institutional norms within which markers operate. However, the fundamental point of discourse analysis is to demonstrate how texts are not simply a transparent representation of reality, but can encode and constitute certain ways of seeing the world. The identification and analysis of these different discourses can open up texts which seem to offer a natural and common sense perspective to interrogation and uncover underpinning ideologies relating to power, knowledge and identity in higher education.

Drawing on Bakhtin's (1995) notion of heteroglossia, Jaworski and Coupland (1999, p.7) note that *'most* texts are not "pure" reflections of single discourses' and the Code of Practice certainly embodies multiple discourses and perspectives, some of which are in contestation. The use of a scientific discourse in relation to assessment and feedback serves an ideological function by promoting the process of marking student work as something which is objective, valid and reproducible and therefore sets up student achievement as being something which can be accurately measured and assessed. This notion of assessment is highly compatible with a quality assurance discourse which also emphasises the importance of measurement and the 'comfort of numbers' (Morley, 2003, p.34). It also maintains and promotes the notion of parity of standards across departments and across universities.

There are, however, tensions between this discourse and the others in the Code. The scientific discourse has been critiqued for its promotion of a behaviourist model of learning which is at odds with the humanist perspectives of other learning and teaching discourses (Usher & Edwards, 1994). Ortlipp's (2009) work in relation to competence-based assessment in Australia highlights the particular difficulties that may arise when scientific assessment discourse governs the exercise of professional judgement. In terms of marking and feedback, the use of a scientific discourse in relation to assessment and teaching sets up a tension with the notion of professional, and specifically, professional academic, judgement that is being exercised in the course of the assessment process.

There are other potential contradictions in the Code. For example, although the document grants students certain rights (such as the right to have a piece of work marked within a certain number of days and the right to be treated fairly) it also denies students any right of appeal against academic judgement. The assessment and feedback encounter is already one that is saturated with power, in that the very act of marking a piece of work sets up a specific set of power relationships between assessor and student. The rights-based or consumerist discourse obscures the extent to which the Code is centrally implicated in the production and reproduction of power relationships.

Institutional discourses are clearly significant in establishing the institutional perspective and orientation in relation to assessment and assessment practice and in providing the backdrop for the feedback practices of staff. Despite its authoritative tone and centralist ambitions, it would, however, be a mistake to assume that the Code determines staff behaviour or attitudes in relation to feedback or prescribes their practices. Although the tasks that they undertake and the requirements with which they have to comply are framed by the institutional texts, staff may resist, contest or subvert the discourses which underpin them. They may also develop or draw on alternative discourses through which to locate themselves and their students. Thus, as Fairclough (2001, p.235) observes, discoursal orders are 'put at risk by what happens in actual interactions'. The next chapter focuses on these actual interactions, by analysing the written feedback that staff give to students on their work.

# CHAPTER 4: POLICING KNOWLEDGES

The previous chapter was concerned with the policies and procedures governing feedback, marking and assessment at institutional level. This analysis provides useful insights into the discourses that shape assessment feedback at the macro-level. However, an analysis which rests on discourses alone provides a limited and possibly misleading picture of actual practices within a particular institution. This is particularly so in relation to assessment, suggest Crook, et al. (2006), where the growing proceduralisation and bureaucratisation of assessment may conceal the realities of the organisational processes. Hence the importance, emphasised in the previous chapter, of supplementing or contextualising an analysis of institutional level discourses with a more ethnographic study of the discursive practices relating to marking. This chapter, and the one that follows it, analyses the data from the written feedback that staff gave on student work and from the interviews undertaken with members of staff. These findings are discussed in the context of two central themes – knowledge and identity, both of which are central to the academic literacies approach.

## 4.1    Academic Knowledge

The creation of knowledge through research and the dissemination of knowledge through teaching are core university functions. There are, however, multiple understandings of what constitutes knowledge within the context of higher education and Delanty (2001) suggests that universities connect with and reflect wider societal discourses about the nature and purpose of knowledge. Universities were established in an age of modernity and hence embody a conception of knowledge which is neutral, objective and universal. Universities are also associated with formal disciplinary modes of knowledge (Becher & Trowler, 2001) rather than with the more informal situated and contingent knowledge acquired through professional practice (Eraut, 1994, 2000).

The idea of knowledge as formal, neutral and rational has, however, been contested in critical educational theory and in wider feminist and social theory. Writers such as Bernstein (2000), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Smith (1990) have sought to show how knowledge is implicated in the production and reproduction of dominant

ideologies. Feminist epistemologists have sought to explore and celebrate those knowledges that have been subjugated because they disrupt a world view which normalises rational, linear, universal and objective argument as the dominant mode of discourse (Hughes, 1995). Liberal feminism had critiqued the substantive content of the curriculum in terms of its androcentricity, but radical feminists went further in challenging its epistemological structure and the knowledge practices that that it embodied (Bondi, 1997; Hekman, 1990). Like the new sociologists of education, they aimed to expose the 'interestedness of disinterested knowledge' (Kenway & Langmead, 1998, p.32) but the focus was on identifying the role of patriarchal power and of class and ethnic biases in knowledge-making processes.

Postmodernism has encouraged a general scepticism towards the nature of knowledge and knowledge claims and poststructuralist scholars have focussed on how such claims are constructed and legitimised through discursive practices (1972). The poststructuralist perspective on knowledge draws on the Foucauldian conception of power and knowledge as inextricably interlinked. Foucault argues that mechanisms for the accumulation of knowledge are essential to enable power to be exercised through regulation and control (Smart, 2002). His work on madness, medicine, punishment and sexuality were particularly insightful in relation to the exercise of professional power and how it is sustained through privileged access to a body of knowledge.

Despite the destabilisation of the concepts of knowledge and truth which these theoretical debates prompted, the academy's credentialising authority has enabled it to continue to privilege certain forms of knowledge. The process of giving feedback is strongly implicated in the adjudication of competing claims to knowledge and performs a rhetorical function by positioning particular views as 'not academic'. The process of assigning a grade and giving feedback on student work reflects, whether implicitly or explicitly, an epistemological position that authorises specific knowledge claims. This is most obvious in the comments that are made in relation to the validity or otherwise of certain sources of or types of knowledge. Making a decision about whether something counts as evidence involves conferring upon it an epistemic status, and engages markers in the framing of what constitutes valid knowledge in their

particular academic context. This chapter explores how and why markers make these judgements.

### 4.1.1   Sources

The need for students to base knowledge claims on appropriate evidence, to provide references to sources and to support assertions with links to the relevant academic literature was a constant theme in the sample of scripts across units and across levels. Some examples included:

> You need to show sources for all your assertions. (U01863)

> MUST reference all claims of fact. (U11799)

> Please remember references are the first and often best way to inform the reader of your knowledge and understanding and where these are incomplete/inaccurate or missing it leaves questions regarding your position. (U09892)

> Be careful about making assertions without supporting literary documentary evidence and which presents a one sided view. (U108690)

As well as comments made on the feedback sheet itself, many scripts were liberally annotated with comments probing the sources on which their arguments were based (Really?  Source?  How do you know?  Evidence?  Ref?). However, the feedback that staff gave on student work suggested that not all sources are considered valid bases of academic knowledge and not all sources are accorded equal weight.

The first and most important distinction was that drawn between valid and invalid sources of academic knowledge. The feedback on the samples of work singled out Wikipedia, the *Daily Telegraph*, ordinary dictionaries, official publications and reports as sources which were not sufficiently academic. Whilst official publications and reports were acceptable sources in subject areas which were policy based, students were still encouraged to supplement these sources with more academic literature. There was, however, a considerable difference in attitude towards web sources. For some staff, in some subject areas, the internet could be a legitimate source of knowledge, provided that it was used in moderation as part of a more balanced portfolio of sources and students gave careful consideration to authorship and reliability. Wikipedia was, however, singled out both in feedback on student work and

in interviews, as a particularly pernicious source. At least one member of staff had banned its use as a source and penalised students who cited it in their reference list, and reasons given by staff considering a similar ban included: the unreliability of Wikipedia as a source, the ease of plagiarism and its lack of credibility or authority. Underpinning this, it seemed, was a concern with students' lack of information literacy skills. An inability to apply a critical judgement to the value and reliability of a particular internet source was also noted by Morris (2009) in his larger scale study of students' approaches to online learning.

Within the domain of those sources that were considered sufficiently academic, there was a hierarchy which seemed to reflect judgements that are often made for other purposes, such as the RAE. Monographs, chapters in edited books and journal articles were the preferred sources and although textbooks and distance-learning materials were acceptable in moderation, students were encouraged through feedback to cite the original sources. However, authorship and location do not guarantee the quality of any particular publication, as criticisms of the peer review process have shown (Daniel, Mittag, & Bornmann, 2007). A more holistic approach to information literacies, encouraging students to critique the arguments and evidence of all claims to knowledge, regardless of provenance, might be a more productive approach to developing criticality in students.

The reification of particular sources as 'academic' can also be seen as a mechanism for retaining control over knowledge production, through establishing a binary between academic and non-academic sources that privileges particular types of knowing and knowledge and marginalises others. Furthermore, these texts are often inaccessible (other than at considerable expense) to those outside the academy. By regulating access to these privileged texts, universities are able to maintain an element of control over the production and authorisation of knowledge. According value only to those sources which have been sanctioned by academic knowledge processes requires students to buy in to the superiority of academic ways of knowing and positions them as novices in the university hierarchy.

*4.1.2   Referencing*

Pryor and Crossouard (2010) include referencing in the list of issues which they classify as concrete/procedural, that is as engaging with the practical aspects of doing the assessment task. However, as other writers have observed, referencing can be more intimately linked to the process of academic knowledge production and representation. Hyland (1999a) identified significant differences in the citation practices across different disciplines and argued that these differences were related to the fact that the academics' discursive decisions were embedded in the epistemological and social conventions of their disciplines. Burke and Hermerschmidt (2005) go further in characterising referencing as a social practice. They argue that, although referencing is usually presented and taught as a generic skill or technique, it involves a complex series of judgements which are shaped by powerful institutional constraints and disciplinary contexts. What should be referenced, and how, is like other elements of academic writing, part of a 'competing and contested set of writing methodologies' (Burke & Hermerschmidt, 2005, p.348).

 In the feedback that staff gave on student essays, comments about referencing often elided with comments about the nature and sources of the evidence used. More than half of the scripts in the sample made explicit reference to referencing either in the written comments or in the text. Markers invoked a range of rationales for the importance of referencing in the feedback. Whilst some did imply that it was a technical, presentational matter, others pointed to other reasons why referencing was important in academic writing, such as: providing an evidence trail, demonstrating evidence of reading and understanding, and providing a convincing argument. These reasons were often framed in negative terms, that is, that poor referencing raised questions about the student's subject knowledge, distracted from the discussion or made it difficult to assess the level of subject knowledge.

The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences has a referencing penalties policy which attempts to impose a consistent approach across the four departments in the Faculty. The policy stems not so much from a belief that a particular stance on referencing was required, but from an attempt to respond to complaints from students that staff were

applying different sanctions and to ensure consistency across combined honours programmes. Despite the policy, there were considerable differences evident in the feedback that staff gave to students. Only one marker in the 120 scripts had explicitly deducted marks in accordance with the Faculty referencing policy, and it was unclear what weight had been accorded to the referencing issues in the award of the mark in other cases. One informant identified referencing as one of the sources of greatest inconsistency in marking practices:

> No they will say things like, 'Good argument, good content, breadth of reading, well-constructed piece of work, 64%, but you need to do something about your referencing.' That person is going to go through to the end of year three thinking, 'Well I'll still get a 2:1 without doing anything about my referencing,' and I think you need to clobber it early…So I don't think the students are all treated in the same way when it comes to poor referencing. I think that's where there's a big difference. (R, Sociology)

On the other hand, some members of staff felt that attention to referencing was displacing attention from other more important aspects of the academic writing process:

> I personally think we have ridiculous expectations for referencing and I think it's a shame when you read markers' feedback and it's predominantly about referencing and if a student's really engaged with a particular area and all the comments are about, you know, 'You didn't put page numbers in,' and 'You didn't put your full stop in the right place,' I think it detracts from what the student is trying to do and I think that's a shame and I think we can get too hung up about it really… I think as staff we are now getting far too obsessed with full stops and colons and italics in the right place and all the rest of it and students spend too much time on it and not enough time reading, you know. (F, Criminology)

Different approaches to referencing do appear to bear some relationship to different disciplinary practices. Staff teaching law units, for example, pointed out that primary legal sources such as cases and statutes are not covered by conventional referencing systems. Their primary concern was with ensuring that students were able to cite cases and statutes appropriately in the problem questions which are the dominant assessment practice in most legal subjects. Being able to reference a textbook or article was less of a priority and so markers tended to be more flexible provided that the source was identifiable. However, the influence of departmental and institutional policies was also evident in the attention that was given to referencing in most of the

scripts. Even where marks were not deducted, the importance of accurate referencing was highlighted through the attention that it was given in the feedback.

Approaches to referencing also appeared to index attitudes to students and to pedagogical perspectives. Some staff were reluctant to penalise students and potentially demotivate them, particularly where they felt that referencing was a genuinely complex activity which required considerable practice and experience. For those who felt that referencing was a relatively straightforward technical skill, the discipline of referencing needed to be ingrained early in a student's career through the application of the penalty system:

> This is the thing, and I think partly we're responsible as well because … we don't impose a penalty. I personally can see benefits of imposing a penalty because my gut instinct is it's probably laziness that prevents students from referencing because it's not particularly difficult to reference. (I, Law)

## 4.2    Disciplinary Knowledge

The issue of what constitutes a legitimate source of academic knowledge is tied up to some extent with the issue of disciplinary differences in knowledge production. Scott, Brown, Lunt and Thorne (2004) suggest that each discipline has a set of classificatory, evaluative and methodological criteria through which to judge knowledge claims. The classificatory criteria define what is or is not considered appropriate knowledge, the evaluative criteria judge its value and the methodological criteria define the procedures through which practitioners in the discipline are expected to operate. They also argue that disciplinarity is characterised by its indifference to the practice setting: 'The practice setting is the source for theoretical deliberation, but the discipline retains its role as the ultimate arbiter of knowledge claims' (Scott, et al., 2004, p.42).

The organisation of academic knowledge into distinct disciplines is a relatively recent phenomenon. Delanty (2001) traces the birth of disciplines to the rise of positivism and the privileging of scientific knowledge which emerged in the late nineteenth century. As expertise became more specialised, disciplinary boundaries became reinforced through the development of learned societies and disciplinary-based journals and

conferences. In teaching, too, broad-based science or humanities degree programmes were replaced by increasing specialised single honours offerings (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Despite Gibbons' (1994) claims that knowledge is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary in nature in the context of application, disciplinary boundaries appear relatively intact within the organisational frameworks of many universities (Jansen, 2002).

The relationship between the form of knowledge and how knowledge-making communities are organised is also the theme of a landmark study of academic disciplines (Becher, 1989; Becher & Trowler, 2001). This study set out to explore the relationship through different dimensions of academic work and practices. The book concludes that different types of discipline are associated with different patterns of knowledge production which structure and are structured through the disciplinary community. The authors acknowledge the crucial role that discourses play in the development of knowledge communities. They argue that that how academics engage with their subject and 'the narratives they develop about this are important structural factors in the formation of disciplinary cultures' (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p.23).

The idea that knowledge is constructed and validated in specific disciplinary contexts which give rise to approved disciplinary discourses is also a key theme of the sociology of scientific knowledge literature, where the texts produced by academic writers are considered to instantiate the specific ways that knowledge is constructed and negotiated within that disciplinary community (Bazerman, 1988; Myers, 1990). In the field of rhetoric studies, researchers have also explored the discourse conventions practiced within particular disciplinary communities. Hyland (1999a, 1999b, 2000) uses detailed corpus analyses to detect how different disciplines use linguistic conventions such as metadiscourse, directives, citation, intertextuality, interaction, hedging, self-reference, modality, acknowledgements, and persuasion. He suggests that 'our routine and unreflective writing practices are deeply embedded in the epistemological and social convictions of our disciplines' (Hyland, 2000, p.40) and therefore uses text as an organising framework from which to hypothesise about how knowledge is organised within the disciplines.

Although there is now an extensive literature on disciplinary discourses, most of the work has been concerned with the discourse of research, including scientific papers, journal articles and research proposals. Some of Hyland's corpus analyses (2002a, 2002c, 2003) include a wider range of genres, including undergraduate dissertations and doctoral theses, but less attention has been paid to analysis of pedagogical discourse, such as the writing that academics do in preparing course handbooks, developing distance-learning materials, setting assignment questions and giving feedback on student work. Yet criminology is constructed not just through the public discourse of high stakes criminological writing but in the feedback that staff give to students about the appropriate ways of writing about criminology. What comes to be constituted as academic knowledge or criminological knowledge is shaped through social and cultural activity, by ideological commitments and through the discourse community in which the writer is located.

The previous section has identified the ways in which staff distinguished between academic and non-academic knowledge in the feedback that they give on student work, but the interviews with staff provided some additional insights into some of the potential disciplinary differences in what constitutes appropriate evidence. In most sociology units, for example, students were expected to use sociological theories as their primary source of evidence; in law, the evidence was primary legal materials, cases and statutes, with limited use of secondary sources such as textbooks or journals; and in psychology, empirical evidence tended to be privileged. These differences, suggests Hyland (2004), are tied up with different methods of knowledge production within the disciplines:

> But the kind of hierarchy of material is… it's engagement with primary and secondary social theory and engagement with the authors that I've talked about in the course. (P, Sociology)

> It probably is more research driven, theory driven, that's how psychological knowledge or theory arises in doing research, so that's what psychologists would consider to be evidence…it would be research that people have found rather than evidence of things like political speeches or government reports or things which are just based on opinion especially. (L, Psychology)

Disciplinary differences extended beyond the source of evidence – some informants suggested that there was a difference in the nature of argumentation:

> Psychology is a little bit more about sitting on the fence, it's about balancing arguments and saying well...if you want to explain anything conceptually there is one way of explaining it which could be this way and there is another way of explaining it which could be this way and probably coming to the conclusion it's probably a bit of both...it comes about from competing views, whereas the way that the psychology students that I've seen who feel disappointed with the marks they get from criminology if they're lower when they use that kind of approach is because...not that they're being criticised overtly for this but the implication seems to be that they need to be more forthright and they need to have to adopt a particular view to get a better mark… (L, Psychology)

Staff were aware of these disciplinary differences and acknowledged that there were different styles and expectations across disciplinary boundaries. However, the nature of the curriculum framework meant that disciplinary differences did not often have to be negotiated by staff. In subjects such as criminology which draw on a range of different disciplines, modularisation leaves different disciplinary traditions intact, as units which are identified as being primarily psychological, legal or sociological implement their own expectations and conventions in relation to writing, assessment and feedback. Even combined honours programmes take a multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary approach, that is, they draw on knowledge from different disciplines rather than integrating them (Choi & Pak, 2006), usually simply combining units from different degree structures, rather than encouraging the development of a genuinely interdisciplinary curriculum which transcends disciplinary boundaries.

These disciplinary differences were sometimes made visible. One example was where a student on a combined honours programme was supervised by a member of staff from outside their home department:

> I've spoken to a couple of people where we've got that crossover and we're looking for things which are different to what they're looking for over there, and it involves goodwill I think on the part of both supervisors to actually reach a result that's fair to the student at the end of it...And so it can work either way with that, which is difficult, I mean it's difficult for two colleagues in completely different faculties to work sufficiently closely with each other through the year to say, 'Right, what are you telling M to do?' 'Well, I'm telling M to do this.' Life doesn't work like that. (H, Law)

Here the disciplinary differences were negotiated on an essentially bilateral, private basis and so did not really impact on the practices or assumptions of other markers within the department. The differences that surfaced where students from different courses or faculties were taught on the same unit presented more of a challenge:

> I can tell when I'm reading a criminologist's answer to anything because there'll be loads of sources, there'll be loads and loads of sources everywhere in the text, and saying, 'Now so-and-so says this', and you think, 'Ah, criminology.' And it is because quite rightly again the emphasis being on reading a lot of different sources and bringing in what a lot of different people think, whereas in law it seems to me we're far more interested in, 'Yeah, that's all very nice, but what's the answer? What are you going to tell your clients at the end of all this?' So there's less credit given I think for that sort of breadth than there would be in criminology, as I understand it. (H, Law)

> I think psychologists have a particular way. They like lots and lots of words and lots of reference to what this study's done and what this study's done and what this study's done, joined altogether at the end and have your conclusion and obviously the law, and I've noticed this from the students in particular, not necessarily the staff, but the law students will cite obviously because it's their background, they will cite a lot of legal cases from the last year whereas our students will never do that, you know, even though it's a law course, they tend not to do that sort of thing. (F, Criminology)

Units which taught students from across a range of different programmes often had considerable problems in negotiating the different expectations and approaches of students from different disciplines. Where these problems fed into poor feedback from students, however, these problems were often diagnosed as being course management or teaching issues rather than to do with discipline. This misrecognition or misdiagnosis of an issue as being about process or procedure rather than content or knowledge was also evident in the combined honours programmes. Subjects were often coupled because of the apparent overlap in the object of study, without sufficient regard for their different epistemological approaches.

> Personally I don't know about psychology and sociology as a combination. It's two disciplines that are pulling in very, very different directions, even if they're in some senses talking… well, they're not talking about the same thing but it looks as though they're talking about the same things some of the time. (O, Sociology)

> So, yeah, of course sociologists will be deeply critical of a lot of the basic sort of tenets of a psychological approach or a psychological approach alone to any given subject...I'm sure I'm caricaturing what the psychologists say horribly. But there's a tension there I think. And some of the students seem to cope better with that than others. But just on the basis of what I know about sociology and much smaller amount that I know about

psychology, I can see that in theory that might be quite a difficult one to reconcile. (P, Sociology)

Combined honours programmes at the University of Portsmouth are literally constructed through the combination of halves of two separate degrees, and so there are no bridging units which can address some of the explicit epistemological and disciplinary differences. Although some members of the criminology team identified strongly with their own disciplinary heritage, at least one member of staff was resistant to the maintenance of these disciplinary silos.

> So what I try to do is bring in not just criminology stuff but psychology, social psychology, sociology, history, law. I try to combine all those as the core ones, because I think it's important, because criminology is multidisciplinary in practice, and in theory. (A, Criminology)

These examples illustrate how institutional frameworks and course structures are implicated in the construction of criminology as a discipline. Although the Quality Assurance Agency (2007) recognises criminology as a distinct discipline for the purposes of subject benchmarking, the unitisation and fragmentation of the curriculum allows different disciplinary traditions within criminology to flourish. As a consequence, it is often left to students to accommodate the different disciplinary discourses which they encounter:

> Because sociology probably more than any of the other disciplines is basically about getting people to be highly critical towards not just everyday common sense but also other established versions of reality. It's the whole notion of being critical towards knowledge itself. And I think psychology is maybe much surer about the objective and given nature of the kind of knowledge that it has at its fingertips. And that may well be feeding through to some extent in what sociologists... but quite a lot of them I think simply cope with it by learning to be bi-lingual. (O, Sociology)

> You know, they come to realise that psychology is a very different sort of game. And they learn to play the psychology bits of what they're doing by the psychology rules. Because they'd be shot down in flames by the psychologist and probably quite rightly so, if they started to get to kind of clever clever about psychology from a sociological point of view. (P, Sociology)

Lapping (2005) argues that disciplinary discourses position students in certain ways, by requiring them to adopt particular modes of reasoning and ways of constructing knowledge claims. However, she also suggests that the relational effects of

institutional cultures and gender relations are equally important in accounting for how students might be accommodated or marginalised in particular situations. Whilst female students, for example, may be able to perform particular forms of argumentation and evidence claims required by a particular discipline, this may conflict with gendered expectations about female behaviour. Thus, students are not just grappling with different disciplinary discourses and practices but with 'contradictions within the discursive fields of gender, disciplines and institutions' (Lapping, 2005, p.670).

## 4.3    Personal Knowledge

The epistemological and gatekeeping functions of feedback are also evident in staff's response to students who draw on their personal experience and opinions in their work. In interviews, staff gave a range of reasons why a personal viewpoint was to be discouraged. Some staff felt that students should, in the first years of study at least, focus on acquiring a good knowledge and understanding of the subject area through the existing research literature, before bringing their own opinions and perspectives to bear. Others felt that personal experience had limited value as evidence and students should be encouraged to look at empirical research which drew on the experience of a wider range of subjects. For these reasons, most informants explicitly discouraged students from invoking self or the personal in written work. That included the use of personal experience of the particular phenomenon being written about and where students expressed an explicit personal opinion on any aspect of the essay or the evidence.

> I don't think there's ever a situation where it would add any value whatsoever to what a student was writing and if students have got particular experience of an issue I tend to encourage them not to write about it because I think it's very difficult to write a balanced piece of work if you have suffered or if you have been a part of.... (F, Criminology)

> Do you know one of the things, I would say, that we're looking for, not that we get, but we would like, ideally, is to move them away from anecdote and personal experience, you know, 'When my auntie had to go up to the local hospital...' type contribution to an essay to, you know, to something more along the lines of having read something (R, Sociology)

However, from a poststructuralist perspective, the exclusion of personal experience from academic writing sets up a binary framework which privileges objectivity over subjectivity, rationality over emotion and academic research over personal experience. As the second element of each of these binary pairs – subjectivity, emotion and personal experience are associated with female ways of knowing, the exclusion of personal experience from academic writing can also be seen as gendered. Thus essayist literacy practice has been the focus of feminist critique for reflecting 'the discursive routines of particular social groups whilst dismissing those of people who, culturally and communally, have access to and engage in a range of other practices' (Lillis, 2001, p.39). Certainly, Lillis (2001, p.115) found that the 'institutional rejection' of personal experience was a particular issue for the student writers in her study, who felt marginalised by the lack of opportunities for drawing on their own lived experiences as a resource for knowledge production or meaning making within higher education.

In many cases, the exclusion of personal experience and opinion from academic writing is tied up with the issue of the first person. The explicit injection of the embodied self through the use of 'I' disrupts the objectivity and neutrality of the text and can be seen as an implicit challenge to these academic values (Letherby, 2000). The use of the first person was picked up upon and discouraged by markers:

> Please avoid the first person narrative. An academic essay should wherever possible be written as an impartial text which becomes very difficult when you personalise in this way. (U09892)

> Avoid the first person, it is often difficult to remain unbiased once you personalise. (U09892)

> Do not write in the first person at degree level. (U10555C)

> …avoid the use of the first person. An alternative way to state this idea is to start as: 'personal experience of visiting prison shows that…' (U16358)

In the first of these examples, the marker explicitly refers to the rhetorical function of the first person in providing the appearance of objectivity, but the marker in the second example appears to suggest that the very use of the first person or third person can introduce or eliminate bias in a written text. In interviews, staff across all

disciplines identified a range of other reasons why the use of the first person was to be discouraged in student writing:

> ...and this is why, you know, keep it in the third person as much as possible and you shouldn't really be doing 'I think' and 'I think' and 'I think' because there is no way of backing it up and the idea is to show that whatever you think is rooted in something that you can draw a sensible conclusion from because either other people think the same or there is enough evidence to suggest, you know... (G, Law)

> I discourage first person narratives. I say, 'Look, in your introduction you say things like, "this essay will..." rather than, "I will"' because I just thought that was a standard academic convention. I mean, yeah, you can write, 'I' and 'we' in books and articles and stuff, but for an academic essay I ask them to avoid that. (A, Criminology)

> Now we have one tutor on the team that doesn't mind a bit getting, 'In my opinion,' and 'I think that...' and I hate it and I think most of my colleagues aren't happy with it but it is again something personal. (R, Sociology)

> Although there's, in this department of, what, 50, I think there's one member of staff or a couple of members of staff that think, you know, that you can write in the first person, but I would say that the vast majority would say that that shouldn't happen and I think that's stamped out quite early on, as is the use of any personal experience and often first years will put something in about, you know, the last time a police officer beat me up, or something, you know, it's generally regarded with horror by academic staff and people are told not to do it but again it's a learning process that we don't set these things out for students necessarily, it's when they do it we tell them not to do it and I'm not sure it's terribly helpful in the same way that we don't tell them that they shouldn't abbreviate words (F, Criminology)

In some of these examples, however, the issue about the use of the first person is often wrongly conflated with the use of personal experience. Although the use of the first person and the use of personal experience often go together, particularly in student essays, there is no necessary correlation between the two. Using the first person is an issue which is related to how knowledge is presented and/or the rhetorical strategies that are used to represent it, rather than necessarily with the epistemological status of personal knowledge. A personal opinion or use of personal experience can quite easily be conveyed in the third person, as one of the markers in the examples on the previous page demonstrates. The use of the first person also has a number of functions which do not involve expressing a personal opinion, for example, guiding the reader through a text, positioning the writer in relation to a text, or providing a factual account of the writer's involvement in the collection of data.

Labelling this simply as a rhetorical issue tends to side step the issue of what constitutes valid knowledge in the academy and how it comes to be labelled as such.

Despite the general tendency to exclude the personal from academic writing, there are some assessments in which the use of personal experience is required. These units are often related to the introduction of personal development planning (PDP), which requires students to reflect upon their personal experiences of learning in order to demonstrate how their transferable skills have developed (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2009). The concept of PDP was first floated by the Dearing Committee (Dearing, 1997) and subsequently became a policy that all institutions were required to implement (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000). At the University of Portsmouth, opportunities for PDP are generally embedded in level one study skills units where students complete an individual learning profile and monitor and evaluate their progress through reflective assessments.

David and Clegg (2008) are sceptical about the potential for personal growth and development that the PDP agenda might promise, arguing that it has been captured by neo-liberal discourses which are primarily concerned with producing an 'employable' subject for the knowledge economy. Certainly, the writing required in these units offers few opportunities for students to disrupt the binary framework between personal experience and academic knowledge, or to create the connections between lived experiences and meaning making in academic writing that Lillis (2001) advocates. Instead, the assessments seem to demand a somewhat formulaic overview of a learning journey, characterised by Macfarlane and Gourlay (2009, p.455) as 'the "hidden curriculum" of emotional performativity'. This requires admissions of mistakes, a moment of revelation, but, ultimately, conformity to the prevailing orthodoxy. Thus, in these units, feedback sometimes indicates that the writing was not personal enough:

Your <u>personal</u> reflection does not seem to be very 'personal'. (U10864)

Your personal reflection is a bit thin. (U0155C)

Your personal reflection is more of a conclusion – this should have been an opportunity for you to comment on the way you personally react to the issues and what you found easy/hard. (U10864)

In the same way that scientific discourses of assessment can be seen as gendered, so too can the marginalisation of personal experience in academic writing. Hey and Leathwood (2009) suggest that the dominant discourses of rationality and objectivity which underpin Enlightenment conceptions of academic knowledge have marginalised the emotional aspects of the pedagogical experience. At a surface level, the PDP agenda might appear to recognise the importance of the affective domain in higher education and to foreground reflective skills and self-knowledge. However, the style of writing required in PDP highlights the conflicts between the gendered and disciplinary regulations that Lapping (2005) has identified in her work. Here, the issue is the tension between the codes regulating successful academic writing as objective, impersonal, emotionless and the codes regulating the performance of gender. The type of personal, reflexive writing that the unit demands is incompatible with the masculinist discourse of the academy. Thus the study skills unit, although credit rated, is seen by many academic staff as a low status or 'non-academic' unit. Staff are often reluctant to do study skills seminars and the teaching on these units tends to be done by the more junior members of the department. The assessments are not seen as proper academic writing and are marked on a pass/fail basis. Students get the message that personal knowledge and experience is less important or less valued than academic knowledge. In many respects, then, these units appear simply to reinforce rather than undermine the boundaries between personal experience and academic knowledge.

## 4.4    Professional Knowledge

The epistemological issue at the heart of the discussion about the use of personal experience – what constitutes valid knowledge in the academy and how it comes to be so constituted – is further complicated where the personal experience in question is rooted in a professional context. In ICJS many students are not expressing an opinion based on an isolated encounter with the criminal justice system, but drawing on their professional experience of working in the criminal justice system. The production of

knowledge about crime and criminality has had a long and established presence outside the academy, in government institutions and in professional practice. Crime and the reduction of crime is central to modern political agendas and government funding drives evaluation and research priorities and shapes the production of knowledge. Rock (2007, p.35) notes the growing influence of government and government funding in 'shaping the form, mode and content of the discipline'.

The production of criminological knowledge in government departments or research units is referred to by many academic criminologists as 'administrative criminology' and has been the subject of significant critique for its failure to adequately theorise or critique managerialist approaches. Presdee (2004, p.276) criticises it for a pseudo-scientific approach which has 'produced an overdetermined descriptive criminology'. The potential tensions between 'theory-oriented' and 'practice-based knowledges' have been explored by Eraut (1994, 2000) and Crossouard and Pryor (2009, p.378) also refer to the 'different warrants of truth' on which academic and professional knowledge are established. The contested discourses and practices of academic and administrative criminology are also evident in education and training programmes for criminal justice professionals, which reflect the different ways that professional experience is constructed within different programmes.

The police service was traditionally a non-graduate profession with a reputation for scepticism about, or even hostility towards, university education (M. Lee & Punch, 2004). Even where the official rhetoric embraced higher education, Young (1991, p.38) noted that the police service still held to 'a central ethic of distrust of the academic'. However, there have been a number of changes in both policing and in higher education over the past 20 years which have impacted on the relationship between the police service and universities. With participation rates in higher education reaching 45% of 17-30 year olds in 2008/9 (National Statistics, 2010), more graduates are being recruited into the police service. Several higher education institutions have developed part-time distance-learning degrees in policing and related subject areas which are targeted at serving police officers. Other institutions have entered into partnerships with local forces to deliver a foundation degree as part of the Initial Police

Learning and Development Programme. As a consequence of these developments, there are an increasing number of police officers with graduate qualifications. There were, for example, over 5000 graduates (16% of the total number of full-time employees) serving in the Metropolitan Police in 2008 (Metropolitan Police, 2008).

Police officers studying at ICJS take either an honours degree programme, the BSc in Crime and Criminology, which is open to any member of the public, or one of the two foundation degrees – in Policing or Investigation and Evidence – which are only open to police officers or other criminal justice professionals. Police students on the open access degree take academic units which are almost wholly assessed by essays. The first assignment on the study skills unit is formative and aims to teach students how to write an academic essay. In this essay, some students had referred to their professional experience but markers tended to equate this with personal experience and rejected it as an appropriate form of evidence for an academic essay.

However, a different approach was taken on the foundation degrees. Foundation degrees are sub-degree level qualifications developed in partnership with employers to provide a qualification which combines work-based learning with academic study (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2005). They are explicitly located in the knowledge-based economy agenda, aimed at producing employees with skills to match specific workforce needs. The integration of academic knowledge with the work-based element of the programme was intended to be achieved largely through setting assessments which would require students to apply academic theories and research to their own professional experience and context. Some units studied exclusively by foundation degree students have assessments which require students to contextualise fairly conventional essay questions within their professional practice, for example:

> Why is an understanding of different policing styles and principles associated with them important for police officers at all levels? Discuss with reference to the policing strategy and policy operating within your own force area. (U10864)

Other units used a hybrid genre, 'the academic report', which allowed students to use elements of a professional report writing genre, including for example, tables,

headings and bullet points, but with the strict application of the usual academic referencing requirements. For example:

> Methods of reducing the incidents of anti-social behaviour in a town centre on Friday and Saturday night (you may choose to focus on a real or imaginary town centre).

Some of these units also included an element of personal reflection, where students were invited (or required) to give a response to how the academic perspectives linked with their own professional experience. In all of these examples, a wider range of sources, including internal force documents, personal communications and so on seemed to be permitted, provided that they were appropriately referenced using Harvard APA. The feedback, in contrast to that on the conventional academic units, strongly encouraged the use of the relevant professional experience and context:

> I think it would have added value if you had linked your use of Clarke (2005) on page 3 to the ASB [anti-social behaviour] in Ayia Napa. Show how that might manifest itself in the behaviour seen. This also applies to the list on page 6 of the essay. (U10864)

> There was scope to anchor your discussion more closely to the Nicosia experience – with examples. (U10864)

The foundation degrees can be seen as an attempt to integrate professional and academic knowledge and to accord the professional experience of the students an epistemological status which is usually denied. However, on closer inspection, the binary between the academic and the personal, or the academic and the professional, does not seem to be disrupted to any great extent. Foundation degrees, despite the governments' attempts to market them as an alternative qualification in their own right, do not have the same academic status as an undergraduate honours degree (Gibbs, 2002). Students are marked on a pass/fail basis and if they go on to do an undergraduate honours degree as a top up, none of their marks count towards their final classification. The introduction of professional knowledge and experience as part of the degree seems to have led to its devaluing as an academic qualification.

Despite the trend towards contractual partnerships between individual police services and higher education institutions in delivering foundation degrees, most police

graduates have acquired their qualification outside of the police education and training framework. This is in sharp contrast to the position in the Probation Service where, until 2008, trainee probation officers were required to undertake a two-year programme which confers a Diploma in Probation Studies/BA honours degree and a level 4 NVQ award (Nellis, 2000, 2001, 2003). This programme was offered in partnership with a number of higher education institutions who provided external accreditation and delivered the academic elements of the programme to the specification provided by the National Probation Service in Probation Circular 18/2007. The new National Probation Qualifications Framework introduced in April 2010 by the National Offender Management Service introduced a more flexible curriculum and structure which provided an alternative route to qualification (the Graduate Diploma in Probation Practice) for entrants with a relevant degree and a progression route, via a foundation degree, for Probation Service Officers.

This different emphasis was evident in the nature of the units, the assignments that were set and the feedback that staff provided to students. Assessments tended to have a more explicitly professional focus which required students to draw on both professional and academic knowledge and to engage in explicit reflection on their professional practice. In one unit, for example, students selected a work-based case study, reflected on the decisions that they made and demonstrated what they learnt from this. They also had to draw on examples from their own practice to demonstrate an awareness of how their practice had developed in relation to ethical and value dilemmas and demonstrate relevant knowledge and understanding of legislation and occupational guidelines. The feedback on this unit focussed on whether students had been sufficiently critical of their own attitudes and beliefs and how they had improved their practice through this reflexive self-awareness.

The feedback reflected some of these key differences in approach. Although the coversheet that was used for this unit was the generic ICJS one, several of the markers had produced typewritten feedback on a separate sheet of paper which was explicitly linked to the unit learning outcomes or to specific practitioner competences. There were also some differences in the linguistic features of the feedback, which pointed to

potential differences in the relationship between markers and students on this particular course. The use of hedges and tentative language was more evident in the feedback than in other units, for example:

> You could perhaps have indicated the legislation under which the offenders were sentenced. (U11422B)

> You identified a good ethical dilemma, but could have been more specific. (U11422B)

> You mentioned a dilemma, on p.5, but could have explored it in greater depth.

> I think there was scope to look a little more into some of the ethics of working with an offender who has caused such a high level of harm. (U11422B)

The feedback was often more dialogic in nature, asking specific questions to prompt reflection, rather than simply to ask for clarification.

> Why did you not do this?  How would you ensure this?  How did you do this?  How did you mitigate or manage the risk of self harm in work with the offender? Can you offer an example?  What were the signs? Why did you feel isolated? What were your thoughts and feelings? (U11422B)

The probation programme also appeared to demand a more thorough integration of work-based and academic learning than was the case on the foundation degrees:

> You have not located this [reflection] in a theoretical framework. There are very few references to reading and research… Whilst it is helpful to set out your own experiences and identify how they have informed your personal values, this needed to be located in a framework of theoretical understanding. (U11422B)

> There is no doubt that your knowledge in relation to reflection, criminological theory, effective practice and offender management is developing but in terms of this piece of work you need to link your discussion to case examples you have observed/co-worked or experiences whilst on placement. (U11422B)

> You mention a number of useful theoretical perspectives that you identify as relevant to practice. But what is lacking is a direct linking of these theories with your practice and how the latter has been informed, challenged or changed by your learning. (U11422B)

The differences between assessment and feedback practices on these three different programmes – an undergraduate honours degree, a foundation degree and the hybrid professional/academic entry qualification – illustrate the complex and multiple relationships between academic and professional knowledge in a single university department. The relationship seems most successful on the probation programme,

which can perhaps be attributed to the central role of the employer and the explicit gatekeeping function of the qualification. In foundation degrees, where the employers are involved in curriculum design and development, academic knowledge and discourse remains dominant despite some efforts to value professional practice and experience as a source of knowledge. In the standard undergraduate honours programmes, where the individual practitioner is undertaking the programme for their own personal development, professional knowledge and practice are marginalised.

On the basis of this study, it appears that, within criminology at least, the argument that new modes of knowledge production within the contexts of application are displacing discipline-based knowledge (Delanty, 2003; Fuller, 2003; Gibbons, et al., 1994) has not been realised. Gibbons et al. (1994) argue that disciplinary knowledge was being challenged by the different types of knowledge production taking place outside of the academy. They contrast the Mode 1 knowledge production of the university, which is discipline-based, localised and tends to be produced by individuals and quality assured by peers, with the 'new production of knowledge'. This new Mode 2 knowledge is produced in the context of application, and is characterised by transdisciplinarity and heterogeneity. It tends to be globalised in nature, produced by teams and quality assured through the mechanisms of the market. Although Gibbons et al. (1994) suggest that this socially distributed system for the production of knowledge will supplement rather than displace Mode 1 knowledge, they also argue that it would have significant implications for the role of universities and for how research was organised and funded.

Gibbons et al.'s work has had a considerable impact in the academic literature and on higher education policy and practice, but it has also been the focus of considerable critique. Hessels and van Lente (2008) identify three categories of objection: the empirical validity of the new production of knowledge thesis, its theoretical and conceptual strength and its political value. In the first category, Peters (2006) suggests that the theory lacks empirical support and Godin (2000) argues that the distinction between Modes 1 and 2 is illusory, because universities have never been exclusively concerned with Mode 1 type knowledge. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary

projects have a long history within the academy, as have projects involving knowledge producers from outside.

The theoretical and conceptual strength of the thesis has also been questioned. Referring to the typology as the 'myth of the modes', Fuller (2000) argues that these two patterns of knowledge production are presented as mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, excluding the possibility of more complex and diverse patterns of knowledge production (Fuller, 2000, p.xii). Although the point that universities are no longer the primary mechanism of knowledge production is difficult to dispute, Gibbons et al.'s (1994) binary is problematic in its oversimplification of how knowledge is produced in the academy and its over-statement of the case for complexity outside the academy.

Clearly, however, the distinctions between academic and professional knowledge remain important at both the macro- and micro-levels of academic discourse. The impact of globalisation and the rise of the knowledge economy suggest that the hegemonic position of the university as the primary knowledge producer might be under threat. The implications of these changes have led to the university attempting 'to break free from the rigid boundaries that it imposed on itself with regards to knowledge construction and development' (Scott, et al., 2004, p.9). These attempts have included competing in the marketplace and in the workplace and have involved academics engaging with other forms of knowledge production which have the potential to challenge the primacy of academic knowledge and potentially destabilising their own authority:

> As well, you might be marking them on their practice and it might be linked…assessments that link practice with academic knowledge, and they question, well, you're out of practice, I'm in practice, what do you know? So, yeah, I would say they are much more challenging than, a full-time undergraduate student who isn't going to start saying, I don't think you quite know your criminological theory as well as you should. (B, Criminology)

## 4.5    The Discursive Construction of Knowledge

This chapter has offered an insight into the processes of knowledge construction within a particular discipline, by exploring some of the pedagogical discourses employed by members of staff to position themselves and their students in relation to authorised criminological knowledge. Students coming into the academy are required to privilege academic sources of knowledge and academic knowledge-making practices over other sites of knowledge production. Even where tacit knowledge and expertise is located in workplaces, workers have to come to universities 'where their expertise is converted into something of generally recognizable social value by means of formal discipline' (Fuller, p.8). This process is not an epistemologically neutral one, however, and in the process of converting this expertise, staff engage in the establishing and negotiation of boundaries around what constitutes authorised knowledge.

In making decisions about what constitutes appropriate knowledge, markers are engaged in an explicitly epistemological activity. Personal knowledge is generally excluded in most academic writing tasks but students are required to demonstrate personal self-knowledge where reflective practice or skills-based elements of a course are involved. The extent to which professional knowledge is deemed acceptable in the academy is contingent on the type of course and the position of the university in relation to the students' employer. Whilst a limited degree of professional knowledge is invited in courses that are positioned as vocational, more is permitted in courses such as the probation course where it is in the institution's interest to do so. Although often perceived as simply matters of presentation, even comments on referencing have an epistemological function in identifying certain writing practices as appropriately or inappropriately academic.

The exclusion of personal experience, the banning of particular types of source and a requirement to use the first person are all examples of ways in which tutors police the boundaries of student writing. However, specific writing practices and conventions cannot be considered simply as simple or neutral expressions of stylistic preference. From an academic literacies perspective, all these features can be seen as ideological. Lillis (2001, p.78) argues that these conventions 'work towards regulating meaning

making in specific ways' by privileging certain relationships between readers, writers and texts, and excluding particular social groups. The giving of feedback can be seen to 'include and therefore validate certain types of knowledge and exclude and therefore pathologize other types of knowledge' (Scott, et al., 2004, p.44).

This chapter has sought to show how the feedback that staff give on student work is implicated in policing the boundaries of what constitutes appropriate knowledge within the academy. The ongoing identification and othering of 'illegitimate' knowledge produced outside the academy reinforces a hegemonic academic discourse which is characterised by a distancing or detaching from the subject matter and a positioning of the writer's identity as marginal to the production of knowledge. The next chapter focuses on how identities may nevertheless be constructed and performed through the written feedback that markers give.

# CHAPTER 5: WRITING IDENTITIES

The previous chapter focussed on knowledge as the theme through which to contrast the institutional discourses relating to assessment and marking with the pedagogical discourses that emerge from the feedback that staff give on student work. This chapter moves on to consider issues of self and identity in written feedback. Whilst discussion of the relationship between writing and identity, particularly in relation to finding one's 'voice', is commonplace in literature and creative writing, Lea and Street (1998) have argued that academic writing research has tended to neglect identity issues. In the academic literacies framework, the concept of identity is central to an understanding of literacy practices, because of the role of discourse in positioning the subject.

Writers may perform their identity through their writing but writing may also require them taking up, resisting or challenging subject positions that are made available through prevailing discourses. In my CAS, I argued that whilst the academic literacies approach does acknowledge the importance of identity work in student writing, attention also needed to be paid to academic identities. The general question of academic identities and how they might be configured and reconfigured in a shifting social, political and economic context has been explored elsewhere in the literature (Fanghanel & Trowler, 2008; Henkel, 2000). In this chapter, I am specifically interested in the discoursal construction of academic identities through the institutional discourses and pedagogical practices of marking.

The chapter begins with a discussion of theoretical perspectives on writing and identity in social theory. Drawing on Ivanic's (1998) work on writing and identity, I then explore two aspects of marking identity: the institutional self and the pedagogical self. These different selves reflect how markers position themselves in relation to different discourses and, through the feedback that they give, take up particular subject positions. This theoretical perspective emphasises the fluidity and multiplicity of the positions taken up by markers – they may draw on different discourses and take up different positions or construct different selves in different contexts. Markers do not,

however, have access to an unlimited range of possible positions – the options are constrained by the 'possibilities for selfhood' (Ivanic, 1998, p.10) that are available within the institutional and social constraints within which they are operating. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how poststructuralist perspectives on identity might provide a useful theoretical framework through which to understand how competing discourses about writing, marking and assessment are accommodated by individual markers. I suggest that the feedback encounter is not simply a site of struggle for student writers negotiating their identity within the academic community (Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001), but for academic staff negotiating their identities as employees, teachers and scholars.

## 5.1    Writing and Identity

Identity is a central concept in many philosophical, psychological and social theories which has, according to Benwell and Stokoe (2006, p.17), become a 'heavily theorised, academic concept that is a paradigmatic product of its historical conditions, formulated and reformulated in strategic ways by the period or movement under which it arises and the preoccupations of its theorists'. The notion of the individual self emerged from the philosophical traditions of rationality, empiricism, science, humanism, secularism and liberalism which are associated with the Enlightenment. Individuals were assumed to be rational subjects, who through the application of empiricism and reason could improve both their own position and that of the world that they inhabit. The concept of the individual self took a different direction with the development of psychological and biological explanations of the self which emerged in the early twentieth century, but identity continued to be located within the individual.

This notion of a fixed and essential self has been critiqued by postmodern and poststructuralist theorists who have conceptualised the self as multiple, contingent, contested and fragmented. This understanding of the self rests on poststructuralism's location of the subject within discourse. Subjects are positioned within and are constituted through their multiple positionings with the network of discourses that they inhabit. Identities are 'increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular, but

multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (Hall, 1996, p.4).

Through Lea and Street's (1998) academic literacies model, poststructuralist notions of discourse and identity have become an important theoretical perspective in the academic writing literature. Drawing on a broadly poststructuralist approach, academic literacies sees writing as a site of identity construction with specific linguistic repertoires and conventions constructing available subject positions for students to take up. In the work undertaken by Ivanic (1998) and Lillis (2001), for example, there is empirical research to suggest that students' own identities are challenged or unsettled by the different forms of academic and disciplinary discourses demanded, particularly third person and passive constructions, from which their personal identity is evacuated. Particular ways of writing may go beyond mere expectation and become hegemonic practices and invisible to those who write within the constraints.

The most fully developed accounts of this perspective on writing and identity can be found in the work of Clark and Ivanic (1997) and Ivanic (1998). They argue that writing is identity work, in which writers occupy subject positions which have been shaped through socio-cultural processes. They develop a tripartite model of writer identity which incorporates three aspects to the self: the autobiographical self, the discoursal self and self as author. All three aspects are situated within the socially available possibilities for selfhood, that is, the subject positions that are made available by the wider socio-cultural context in which they are located. The autobiographical self is the one which is influenced by a person's life history, and which can be seen as dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984) to write in certain ways. The discoursal self is how the self is presented or represented in a particular written text, either consciously or unconsciously. The final aspect of the self is self as author and relates to the extent to which the writer establishes authorial presence and authority in a particular text. Clark and Ivanic (1997) argue that a person may only choose from the range of existing discoursal options that are available to them, although writers may choose to adopt the dominant discourses or to reject them.

Although I do not propose to use Clark and Ivanic's (1997) model as the analytical framework for this chapter, I do intend to use the heuristic model which underpins it, that is, of different aspects of writer identity being taken up within a range of possibilities of selfhood. This approach provides a very useful way of thinking about how markers accommodate the different institutional, disciplinary and pedagogical discourses which shape the process of giving written feedback. It also provides a productive framework for exploring how the identities of both students and academics may be constructed through literacy practices in higher education. In the next section, I trace how institutional discourses, practices and processes construct different institutional and pedagogical identities from the options for selfhood that are available to markers.

## 5.2    The Institutional Self

A key aspect of identity with which all markers must engage is the 'institutional self', that is the subjectivities constructed through the institutional discourses discussed in Chapter 3. The scientific discourse embedded in the *Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students* (University of Portsmouth, 2009a) positions markers as objective assessors who, through a rigorous application of the relevant criteria, can provide a valid, reliable and reproducible assessment of student performance. The feedback is required to provide an indication of the extent to which the work has met the learning outcomes of the assessment and it should also be linked explicitly to marking and/or grade criteria and enable different grades of performance to be distinguished. The recommendation of the use of a pro forma emphasises the need for consistency between markers in the organisation and presentation of feedback. The mark verification procedure confirms that the grade is broadly accurate and the external examining system confirms that marking is broadly consistent.

The social identity of the marker in this discourse becomes largely irrelevant, provided that he or she is sufficiently qualified to apply the criteria. Part of the mechanism of objectification and objectivism is the mechanism of anonymous marking. This enables the marker to give context-free objective feedback against the assessment criteria. This approach conflicts with other discourses around personalised learning and

reinforces a positivist notion of knowledge in which the subjective individual perspective can contaminate the objectivity and reliability of the assessment process. Tick boxes or mark allocation schemes work in separate ways to try and objectify the process or to place barriers to markers grading on the basis of instinct or experience (Price, 2005).

When giving feedback, markers are forced to engage with institutional discourses around objective assessment and quality assurance through the medium of the assessment coversheet (Appendix 5). This sheet sets out what the feedback should include (the accuracy and relevance of information and knowledge, application of knowledge and relevant theory to solve problems and answer questions, development of a coherent argument based on relevant sources and evidence, overall presentation), the general grade criteria against which essays should be marked and the format of the feedback (strengths, areas for improvement, other). It also evidences whether the essay has been second marked, whether the student should be referred to a tutor for further support and reminds staff of their obligations under the student feedback charter. This pro forma therefore plays a central role in reinforcing institutional discourses around objectivity and quality.

However, the coversheet may also obscure the subjectivity of the marking and feedback process and provide a means through which staff can resist institutional discourses. For example, the pro forma functions as a record of compliance with the mark verification procedures in the Code. The standard procedure at ICJS is that the sample of scripts that have been mark verified are also sent to the external examiner, so every one of the 120 scripts in my sample had been looked at by two markers. Yet, despite the data from the analysis of the feedback and the interviews with markers, which indicated a considerable diversity in marking and feedback practices, none of the scripts in the sample showed any evidence of disagreement between the marker and the mark verifier. On the rare occasions where the second marker added anything other than a signature, they simply supported or expanded on the first marker's comments. There was also an absence of any visible disagreement even where scripts had been double blind marked, that is, where each member of staff had independently

assigned a mark and written feedback. The assessment regulations require that the mark and comments be agreed between the markers on a single pro forma before being returned to the student (University of Portsmouth, 2009b), so that there is no evidence of any disagreement. Whilst it is open to departments to retain both forms to send to the external examiner, the ICJS practice is to just send the agreed coversheet.

Another example lies in the discrepancy between the institutional discourse about marking criteria and feedback practice. With the exception of one unit (U11422B) and in clear contravention of the requirement in the Code of Practice that feedback is given against criteria, very little reference was made in the scripts to either the intended learning outcomes of the unit, specific marking criteria for the unit or to the general grade criteria. Again, this seems to some extent, at least, to be a function of the pro forma that is used. The standard form lists generic grade criteria over the page from the comments section, as an *aide memoire* rather than as a template against which marks and comments can be indexed. The exception in the sample was a core unit on the Probation programme, discussed in the previous chapter, which set out four explicit criteria on an adapted pro forma. This course is an entry qualification that is designed around a range of core competences and effectively acts as a licence to practice. The course is therefore more focussed on marking students against specific assessment criteria and ensuring that all the learning outcomes are met.

In other units, however, it seems that the pro forma may have a role in enabling staff to resist institutional discourses rather than constraining them. Using the form allowed markers to demonstrate compliance with the Code to students and external examiners, but to escape censure for failure to mark against the assessment criteria. There were some occasions where the form was bypassed, however. In some cases, this was by staff who wanted to produce longer and more detailed written feedback than the space on the form allowed, and so they wrote out their feedback separately and attached it to the form. For these markers, the form was a constraint to the exercise of pedagogical function rather than as compliance with the quality assurance discourse. In other cases, the form looked as though it had been filled in but had in fact

been used as if it were a blank page – the headings were ignored and the marker had simply written an overall assessment of the student's performance.

Resistance was also shown to the language of the neutral assessor, through staff taking up identities which were more personal and relational and which invoked a pedagogical rather than an institutional identity. In other examples, there was a subversion of, or resistance to, the objectivist discourse, where markers explicitly made their subjectivity known. Morley (2003, p.67) notes that in traditional academic culture 'impersonality was presented as the hallmark of quality and reliability' and emotion was 'the signifier of bias and unreliable knowledge'. There were, however, many references to emotion – including the marker's empathy with the student, their expressions of enjoyment at reading the prose, or (more commonly) difficulty, puzzlement or bemusement at attempts to navigate through the text.

I enjoyed this essay which is well written and stimulating. (U16358)

I liked reading your work. (U10555C)

I realise you will be disappointed. (U09892)

This subverts the notion of the assessment process as entirely rational, objective and devoid of emotion. Therefore, the idea that either the product of academic writing or the process of assessment could provoke pleasure, for example, is quite transgressive (Hey & Leathwood, 2009; Quinn, 2007). This again engages with the notion of the affective domain in higher education and how the emotional and personal aspects of learning have been either marginalised or co-opted by current neo-liberal agendas concerned with constructing an employable subject (Beard, Clegg, & Smith, 2007; David & Clegg, 2008).

## 5.3    The Pedagogical Self

The resistance to the institutional discourses in the Code and other policies and procedures suggests reluctance by markers to take up the subject positions of scientific assessor or quality assurer. Yet the analysis of the feedback presented in Chapter 4 suggests that markers do take alternative subject positions which reinforce

the hegemonic position of particular types of knowledge within the academy. One strategy for accomplishing this is through the taking up of the position of the pedagogic self, which locates markers in particular ways in relation to the student and in the text.

Every coursework sheet in the sample included at least some writing in the second person, although some markers alternated between the use of the second and third person, or even the first, second and third. The use of the second person is a common feature of written pedagogical genres, such as textbooks (Hyland, 2005), and serves several functions. One is to establish a relationship with the student, to speak to them directly about how their work can be improved and to enhance the likelihood that the advice will be taken. However, the use of the second person can also position the writer as an expert and the reader as a novice and reinforce a transmission-based model of pedagogy in which knowledge is transferred from teacher to student. The use of other interactional metadiscoursal features can also reinforce the relationship. In the textbook genre the setting up of an unequal relationship between writer and reader appears to permit or even encourage writers to express opinions more forcefully 'to an audience which is both less knowledgeable and requiring less deference' (Hyland, 2005, p.111).

This lack of deference is clearly evident in the feedback genre too. Feedback makes frequent use of 'attitude markers' to express the writer's opinion and 'self-mentions' to make explicit reference to the author's opinions and perspectives. However, it is through the interventions in the body of the essay that markers appear to exercise their expert authority most forcefully. The use of questions or comments in feedback are examples of 'engagement markers', which 'explicitly address readers, either by selectively focussing their attention or by including them as participants in the text through second person pronouns, imperatives, question forms and asides' (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p.168). However, in the texts which were included in the sample, questions in the text addressed the reader without appearing to build a relationship with them. Examples included: Why??  Really?  Where is this from? Other texts were simply annotated with question marks, exclamation marks or underlinings.

Another striking contrast between the feedback genre and other academic discourse is the degree of self-mention. Hyland (2005, p.53) defines self-mention as 'the degree of explicit author presence in the text measured by the frequency of first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives'. As was discussed in Chapter 4, in the academic conventions which underpin essayist literacy, self-mention is rare, and in published academic writing authorial identity and stance is often obscured (Hyland, 2002a, 2002c). Students too, are usually advised not to use the first person, and there were several examples of this in the written comments on student work. However, in the feedback genre, self-mention is very common:

I am not sure you chose the best approach to answering the question. (U09892)

I think that you have tried to do too much in one instance. (U09892)

I am thinking of the ideas around Relative Deprivation. (U09892)


The use of the first person may function as an interactional device to engage the student reader with the text but it also has the function of reinforcing the expert/novice relationship. Markers' expert knowledge and their position of power in the teacher/student relationship allows them to assert their personal opinions in the text and to claim their authority. Yet this presence of the self in the text stands in contrast to the scientific approach in the institutional discourse which downplays the role of the individual in the assessment process and instead emphasises objectivity, validity, reliability and reproducibility.

The very task of writing an essay to be marked by a tutor locates students as novices and tutors as experts. It also tends to position students as consumers rather than producers of knowledge. Instead of drawing on their own personal or professional resources, students are required to use established academic research and to outline the arguments that have been made by academic authors. The issue over the use of the first person is another example of where students are precluded from engaging with the academic debates and positioned as lacking authority within the academic community. In contrast, markers asserted their authority through self-mention. In this

way students are discursively positioned as novices, 'as members of the community who do not yet have the privilege of 'being granted a special right to speak'' (Bartholomae, 1985, p.631).

The foregoing sections have suggested that an analysis of the linguistic features of written feedback can provide some insight into how the genre works to enable communication and build relationships between marker and student. Metadiscoursal features such as attitude markers and self-mentions therefore have rhetorical, communicative and pedagogical functions. However, this analysis has also suggested that some of this metadiscourse, particularly attitude and engagement markers and self-mentions, reference and reinforce power relationships in the feedback interaction and also function to position markers and speakers in particular relationships. Through the writing that they do on student scripts, markers use language which is associated with positions of power, knowledge and authority.

## 5.4     The Discursive Construction of Identity

Recent research by Bailey and Garner (2010) on assessment and feedback practices at another higher education institution, identified similar tensions between the pedagogical function of feedback and the institutional policies, procedures and priorities. In that institution, as at the University of Portsmouth, there was 'a conflict between their [markers'] conceptions of the purpose of feedback, their pedagogical intentions and the requirements of the system' (Bailey & Garner, 2010, p.195). However, some of the consequences of these tensions seem different. At that institution, the researchers reported that some staff had become 'indifferent to the educational value of written feedback' (Bailey & Garner, 2010, p.195), resulting in formulaic feedback which simply mimicked the vocabulary of assessment criteria in order to comply with the bureaucratic requirements of the institution. At the University of Portsmouth, however, the institutional prescriptions seemed to be bypassed or resisted albeit with outward compliance with the requisite documentation.

One explanation for the difference may lie in the methodological approach used by Bailey and Garner (2010) in their research. They relied on an analysis of interviews with staff and of guides and handouts on good practice in marking and feedback, rather than on an analysis of samples of feedback produced by markers. However, other researchers in this field have found an interesting disjuncture between what lecturers did and what they said they did in relation to marking (Read, et al., 2004; Webster, 2000). This difference between what people say, what they do, and what they say they do, is of course, one of the justifications for, and advantages of, adopting an ethnographic approach.

Another explanation may lie in the complexity of the relationship between institutional discourses, pedagogical practices and writing identities. Rather than trying to find a single explanatory framework for the complex frame of interactions that are embodied in feedback, it may be more productive to draw on poststructuralist notions of multiple discursive identities. Using this approach we can see markers taking up different discursive positions depending on the unit, the student and the specific contexts in which they are located. Whilst the macro-level institutional discourses position feedback as scientific, objective and rigorous, the analysis of pedagogical practices suggests that feedback practices remain subjective, situated and fragmented.

This theoretical approach may also account for some of the seeming discrepancies between the discourses and practices of individual members of staff, insofar as these individuals can be seen as drawing on different identities in different constellations of circumstances. In research by Read, et al. (2005), for example, one of the most interesting themes that they felt emerged from their research was the difference between how some participants described the process of marking and the feedback that they gave on student work. Whilst participants drew on dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity, 'in practice the way they mark and write feedback does not necessarily reflect their articulated views' (Read, et al., 2005, p.257).

This tension appears on a number of other levels. For example, there may be a bifurcation between the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of a marker's

discipline-based knowledge and that of their pedagogical practice. A lecturer who positions themselves as a poststructuralist in relation to the theoretical orientation towards their discipline, may well take an approach which appears to be informed by positivist or behaviourist theories in relation to the practice of teaching, learning and assessment. At the level of feedback given on student work, for example, some staff required students to conform to specific conventions of essayist literacy (for example, the use of the first person, the passive tense) which reflect a particular positivist mode of knowledge production that the lecturer did not necessarily share in relation to their own positioning within the discipline. Thus a lecturer who adopted a constructivist approach to knowledge in their subject area in which knowledge was situated, partial and contested, may still insist that students represent that knowledge in a way that reflects a view of knowledge which is objective and universal.

Where identity is understood as fixed or essential, this presents something of a paradox. However, poststructuralist theories of identity as multiple, fluid and located in and called into being through discourse, provides a more helpful explanatory framework. These different approaches and the identities that they reflect are positioned by the different discursive regimes that are available to academic staff. Thus, the disciplinary, subject based, expert identity can be seen as being constructed through the disciplinary discourse to which the lecturer subscribes, whereas the pedagogical identity is called into being primarily through the dominant discursive regimes of the institution.

In one respect this finding simply echoes the dissonance between knowledge construction and knowledge representation which has been observed in a different context by Delamont (2000), who noted the emergence of parallel literatures in educational research. Journals focussing on qualitative research and methodology have experimented with different modes of representation and narrative style (such as poetry, ethnodrama, fiction), but the mainstream educational journals continue to be dominated by realist tales (Van Maanen, 1988) which use externalising narrative devices to report the findings of both quantitative and qualitative research. Yet, it can also be argued that the tensions between the epistemological basis of a discipline and

its written representation is symptomatic of a wider separation between different types of knowledges and practice within academia. Scott, et al. (2004, p.11), for example use the term 'compartmentalization' to refer to the process which allows for an academic to 'offer in their published writings radical and transformative accounts of educational processes, and yet adopt within their working lives as senior managers in institutions ways of working and arrangements for subordinates which both reinforce the status quo and reinforce their beliefs'. This, they suggest, is a product of self-reflexive strategies which are adopted by individuals as a response to the multiple identities and positioning of late modern society.

In this section, I have traced how institutional discourses, practices and processes construct different institutional and pedagogical identities – or options for selfhood – that are available to markers. By drawing on the poststructuralist notion of identities as discursively produced, the academic literacies framework can provide a productive account of how markers can be positioned with the multiple institutional discourses of assessment. Staff resistance to the dominant discourses in the institutional documentation can be seen through their contestation of the dominant discourses and invocation of counter discourses which locate the values and principles of assessment and feedback practice in different areas – in their own disciplinary discourse and in the departmental ethos.

However, this analysis also reveals the potential limitations of the academic literacies framework in accounting for agency. An understanding of the subject as being constructed wholly or mainly through discourse constrains the capacity for individuals to effect change. It explains how individuals are constituted through discourse but not necessarily how individuals are constitutive of discourse. This is a criticism, not just of the academic literacies approach, but of the poststructuralist notions of identity, subjectivity and discourse which underpin it. In some of the more radical poststructuralist literature, for example, the agency of the writer is erased. Whilst Barthes (1977) and Derrida (1976) shift the focus from the author to the language or the text, Foucault (1984) argues that the 'author function' is simply set of historically situated set of assumptions about the production and consumption of texts. Whilst

this is a useful device for highlighting the social and historical specificity of scientific claims to truth, there are a number of problems with a strong constructivist approach. There is a danger, for example, that the categories such as gender and race will be seen as simply discourses to be deconstructed rather than as the source of real inequality and oppression.

These concerns have been particularly evident in the feminist movement, where Clegg (2006, p.315) notes that the 'post-structuralist legacy continues to haunt attempts to think productively about agency' (p.315). One response has been to attempt to reconcile poststructuralism and feminism by exploring how agency is discursively produced (Weedon, 1997). For example, Butler's (1999) work on performativity and identity suggests that aspects of identity are enacted and re-enacted through performance. The human person is constantly in a state of becoming rather than being and there is therefore scope to perform identities differently. Clegg (2006), however, proposes critical realism as an alternative theoretical contribution. Although she acknowledges the importance of poststructuralist thought to feminism, particularly in its deconstruction of the category of 'woman', she argues that critical realism might provide a richer and more productive basis for theorising agency. I will discuss the potential contribution of critical realism to the academic literacies framework in the final chapter.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

## 6.1    Overview of the Research

In the introduction to this thesis, I argued that the production of text has a central role in UK higher education as both a technology for, and signifier of, the learning, teaching and assessment of students. The nature and quality of student writing in the academy has also become an important issue outside it, particularly in the context of a globalised neo-liberal knowledge economy discourse which emphasises the importance of transferable and employability skills (Olssen & Peters, 2005). The work that I undertook for earlier professional doctorate assignments suggests that neither the current pedagogical practice within my own institution (Creaton, 2006c) or the existing academic literature (Creaton, 2007) adequately accounts for the role of academic staff in regulating student writing practices.

The research undertaken for this thesis sought to explore the role of academic staff by focussing on two central research questions. Firstly, what role do academics play in regulating student writing? Secondly, how is this discursive encounter shaped by the specific departmental, disciplinary and institutional contexts in which they are located? Written feedback was selected as the focus of the study because it is a key point at which judgements are made about the standard and quality of student writing. Drawing on an academic literacies framework, the study approached written feedback as a genre with the aim of making sense of the 'complex ways in which staff and students construct appropriate ways of knowing and reproduce appropriate forms of disciplinary and subject knowledge' (Lea & Street, 1998, p.169).

Using a research design informed by linguistic ethnography, the purpose of the empirical element of the project was to examine the written feedback given to students in the context of its production. Data were collected from three main sources: institutional policies and procedures, the written feedback and comments given by staff on 120 pieces of student work, and 18 interviews with academic staff about their expectations in relations to academic writing. Written feedback and transcripts of interviews were coded to identify sections of texts in which staff made or accounted

for judgements about what constituted appropriate knowledge within the discipline and how it was represented. These accounts were analysed in terms of how the subjects were positioned within wider institutional discourses.

My research shows that there was a considerable disjunction between the institutional discourses which regulated marking, assessment and feedback and the actual feedback practices of staff. Despite the strong scientific and positivist discourse that pervaded institutional documentation and guidelines on assessment and feedback, it appeared that many staff drew on a range of alternative discourses and engaged in assessment practices which were more subjective and constructivist in nature to frame the feedback that they gave to students. The contrast was particularly striking when staff gave explicitly emotional responses to the work produced by students. This gap between the institutional discourse and the situated literacy practices was mediated to some extent by the marking coversheet and marking feedback procedures which worked to promote an appearance of consistency and agreement to external audiences.

One of the conclusions to be drawn from this thesis is that the effective theorisation and teaching of student writing rests on an understanding of how academic staff construct and police the boundaries of appropriate knowledge in their discipline. This approach draws on existing academic literacies theories but argues for a more holistic model in which academic writing is co-constructed through the practices of both students who produce the written work and the academic staff who mark it.

## 6.2    The Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis has identified, discussed and analysed the academic writing practices of a single criminology department at a UK university through focussing on the role of written feedback. In so doing, it has made an original contribution to academic and professional knowledge in the fields of academic literacies, feedback and assessment. The collection and analysis of data relating to academic writing practices in a particular site provides additional empirical evidence on the interactions between staff and students over what constitutes appropriate knowledge in the discipline and how it

should be represented. By assimilating this data and synthesising it with the theoretical approaches drawn from academic literacies scholarship and my own professional knowledge and experience, I have sought to show how written feedback is a primary mechanism through which academic staff may regulate how knowledge is constructed and represented, reinforce norms and conventions of academic writing and police the boundaries of their discipline.

These findings add to the work that has been done by other researchers in the academic literacies field, such as Lillis (2001), Ivanic (1998) and Lea and Street (1998). Although the academic literacies approach conceptualises writing at the level of epistemology, power and identity, much of the empirical work has focussed on how students come to understand and acquire certain literacy practices. My contribution to knowledge has been to focus on the role of staff in constructing and regulating student writing practices through the written feedback that they give on student work. My research suggests that marking and feedback are discursive literacy practices which, like student writing practices, are embedded in specific institutional contexts.

This thesis also contributes to the development of the theoretical underpinnings of the field through developing a more nuanced account of how interactions between staff and students are shaped by disciplinary and institutional contexts. The evidence that I have presented suggests that the feedback practices are epistemological, in that they involve judgements about what counts as valid knowledge in the department, discipline or the academy. They are also ideological, in that they are implicated in reinforcing existing patterns of power and privilege. Given the crucial gatekeeping function of marking and feedback, I suggest that an understanding of student writing is incomplete without explicit attention being paid to the judgments that academic staff make about it.

In terms of methodology, this project adds to the body of research which has explicitly positioned itself within the field of linguistic ethnography. This methodological approach has been useful in connecting the micro-level analysis of written feedback with institutional policies and procedures to demonstrate how the complex interplay

of discourses, knowledges and identities shape individual feedback encounters between staff and students. It also suggests that the use of linguistic ethnography may be a productive approach for professional doctorate students and others researching their professional practice. One of the most difficult issues in relation to self-ethnography or insider-ethnography is the difficulty of 'making the familiar strange'. Where languages and cultures are shared, practices may become invisible and the underlying dimensions difficult to spot. Alvesson (2003) uses the metaphor of 'running away' to contrast with the 'breaking in' process of a conventional ethnographic approach. The object is still to uncover implicit assumptions and knowledges but in order to do this the researcher has to achieve a distance from the research and from the research environment.

It is here that linguistic ethnography is particularly useful. In setting out the advantages of a linguistic ethnographic approach, Rampton (2007, p.591) highlights the potential of a micro- analytical focus on discourse for providing a 'greater analytic distance' from environments in which the ethnographer has being immersed. For ethnographers working within their own professional contexts, he suggests that linguistic ethnographic techniques are useful in uncovering and exploring 'taken-for-grantedness' – they help in the process of identifying underlying patterns and belief systems in language and discourse.

## 6.3    Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

In Chapter 2, I set out my rationale for adopting an academic literacies theoretical framework and a linguistic ethnographic methodological approach as the conceptual basis of the thesis. I also identified some of the critiques that had been made of both approaches in the academic literature. Having completed the research, it is instructive to revisit the theoretical and methodological foundations and to consider the limitations of these approaches as research frameworks.

The academic literacies framework was certainly useful in locating the feedback encounter within wider social processes and in showing how positions taken up by staff when giving feedback are constructed through institutional discourses. However,

it was perhaps less successful in showing, firstly, how the learning, teaching and assessment practices of academic staff constitute academic writing discourses, and secondly, how staff in different gendered, classed or racialised positions might respond to these discourses. These limitations may be traced back to the problems of agency inherent in the poststructuralist theory on which academic literacies largely relies. Ashwin (2009), for example, critiques academic literacies for its focus on processes rather than on interactions and for inadequate theorisation of the interplay between structure and agency. He also criticises its lack of sophistication in accounting for the different perspectives of students and academics 'without a sense of how these come together to create particular identities in particular interactions' (Ashwin, 2009, p.39).

In the previous chapter I noted how Clegg (2006) had explored the use of critical realism as a potential source for exploring agency within feminism, and critical realism may also be productive in providing additional theoretical resources with which to explore marking and other learning and teaching processes. Ashwin (2009) makes a strong case that a realist perspective can provide a better account of the interactions between staff and individual students. Although he draws on Archer's (2010) conception of analytical dualism in which structure and agency are distinct, he conceptualises the difference as an epistemological rather than an ontological one. Rather than structure and agency being 'distinct strata of reality' (Archer, 2003, p.2), he sees them simply as different perspectives on or ways of understanding social processes.

In relation to marking, for example, differences in approaches to the use of the first person in academic writing could be analysed agentically in terms of personal preferences made by markers about writing style or it could be analysed structurally in terms of the different ways in which gender or discipline or class shapes appropriate ways of representing knowledge in academic contexts. Whilst some analyses may foreground structure and others may foreground the intentions and actions of agents, both are perspectives on the same social processes of marking and assessment. Ashwin (2009, p.21) therefore advocates a research approach which embraces both structural and agentic accounts of learning and teaching processes in an attempt to

give 'a sense of both the intentional projects of individual and collective agents, and the ways in which these projects are enabled and constrained.' In relation to researching learning, teaching and assessment processes, he argues that this approach opens the way for a much broader range of theoretical resources – such as symbolic interactionism and actor network theory – to be used in theorising higher education and exploring teaching and learning interactions.

In her article on linguistic ethnography, Sealey (2007) makes a similar call, from a critical realist perspective, for methodological eclecticism. Whilst there are tensions between poststructuralist and critical realist philosophies, there is clearly scope for a more explicit discussion of the ontological and epistemological foundations of both academic literacies and linguistic ethnography. In research terms, a critical realist approach could explore the relationships between the actions and intentions of markers and the constraints in which they operate. This might prove a fruitful avenue of research which builds on the findings about the structural constraints that have been focussed on here.

Ultimately, however, it was perhaps the research design and how this shaped the data that could be collected which constrained a more detailed discussion of agency, resistance and identity, rather than the limitations of the poststructural theoretical framework itself. This study has been successful in identifying a range of discourses that are evident in marking and assessment and in the identities that they construct, but there are possibilities, in a future research study, for interviewing members of staff about the specific feedback that they have given on student work and exploring how their social identities might interface with these wider discourses. In pursuing this research, critical realism may add a potentially interesting dimension, but it should be recognised that it may not afford much greater possibilities for supporting change and resistance.

## 6.4    Implications for Professional Practice

As I emphasised at the beginning of this thesis, the professional doctorate is intended to make more than the contribution to academic knowledge that is demanded by a

PhD. A defining feature of the professional doctorate is 'its focus on professional life and work, and an encouragement for participants to enhance their professional work through undertaking doctoral level study which privileges professional knowledge' (Scott, et al., 2004, p.36). In undertaking this research and reporting on its findings, I have been concerned with thinking through the implications for teaching students about writing and in enhancing how feedback might be given. This is compatible with Lea and Street's (2006) academic literacies approach which has both theoretical and practical applications – as a heuristic model for understanding literacy practices and as a framework for curriculum development, training programmes and personal reflection and development.

One of the key themes of the research has been the dissonance between institutional discourses about feedback and assessment and the pedagogical practices engaged in by markers. Institutional discourses are underpinned by a number of implicit assumptions about learning and teaching which tend not to be critically examined by teachers within the institution. The most problematic of these discourses is the scientific assessor discourse which sets up assessment as objective, reliable, valid and reproducible. Yet the evidence from this thesis accords with that of previous research studies which have found considerable variation in grades, comments, perceptions and marking practices and with the conclusion that 'the "quality" of a piece of writing to be assessed is ultimately constructed by the reader of the essay and cannot be objectively ascertained.' (Read, et al., 2005, p.256).

Institutional policies must recognise that, whilst the academy retains its attachment to essayist literacy, the nature of the judgements that are made in relation to student writing will have a strongly subjective edge. The evidence from this research suggests that, even where attempts are made to introduce more objective assessment criteria, staff are guided by their own subjective understandings of achievement which draw on different and sometimes conflicting discourses of institutional, pedagogical and academic identities. Yet universities are promising to deliver a level of objectivity and reliability which is not achievable other than through the adoption of multiple choice tests or other quantitative assessments.

The central task for assessment reform, therefore, is to try and replace the positivist discourse with a constructivist one by finding a new language for feedback and assessment which draws on different notions of quality and explicitly acknowledges the subjectivity of professional academic judgement. This acknowledgement does not necessitate an undermining of confidence in the academic institution and indeed may open up opportunities for a more honest and productive dialogue with students about the purpose and possibilities of marking and feedback. In the same way that qualitative researchers have needed to challenge the assumptions in quantitative approaches to research and to develop new criteria for judging quality, so too, do educational researchers interested in assessment and feedback.

Qualitative research provides a useful starting point for thinking about alternative criteria. Examples might include: credibility (has the marker provided an adequate justification for why they have made the judgement that they have?), fairness (has adequate consideration been given to the perspective of the student?), empowerment (is the student now in a better position to improve their learning potential?) and coherence (are the mark and the feedback compatible?). The problem with proposing these sorts of alternative criteria, however, is that they may just replace one set of problematic measures for another. Furthermore, the very concept of alternative criteria may embody certain realist/positivist assumptions which aim for an illusory rigour (Rolfe, 2006).

A more radical epistemological approach would be to rethink current conceptions of objectivity. Haraway (1988), for example, attempts to reclaim the concept of objectivity from the positivists, suggesting that it is only through the community of partial perspectives and embodied knowledges that objective vision is possible. She accepts that knowledge is always situated, embedded and seen from a partial position, but argues that this is an opportunity to engage with other 'partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections' (1988, p.584). This approach would see the embodied localism of multiple markers' perspectives as a strength rather than a shortcoming. During the course of their degree, students would

encounter a range of perspectives and learn to engage with a range of critiques of their arguments.

Whilst this conceptualisation of the role of feedback may be unusual in relation to the standard essay assignment in the social sciences, this understanding of feedback is a central element of design related disciplines, albeit realised in an oral feedback genre (Dannels & Martin, 2008). An alternative model based in the same notion of situated knowledge is the 'connoisseur' model of assessment which recognises expert judgements as being based on professional expertise and judgements which are deeply tacit and can only be explicated through discussion and shared experience (Rust, Price, & O' Donovan, 2003; Webster, 2000). Both these models would suggest a different approach to the principles and practice of giving feedback.

For this to be effective, change needs to be implemented at the departmental level, because it is at this meso-level that institutional change tends to be embedded or resisted (Trowler, 2005). There are a number of strategies that departments could adopt which would begin the process of displacing scientific discourses of objectivity and reliability with a discourse of professional and academic knowledge and experience. The aim would be to provide a reasonable consensus around what constitutes good or adequate student work according to the standards and values of the department and discipline rather than to imply that student work is being marked against an extrinsic objective standard.

The starting point, particularly with a relatively new and somewhat fragmented discipline like criminology, is to explicate tacit understandings about what constitutes appropriate knowledge in the discipline and what the acceptable ways of representing that knowledge within student assessments are. Sadler (2005, p.192) argues that the focus on making assessment criteria transparent is misplaced, because the difficulties in defining terms precisely simply 'sets up new verbal terms that in turn call for more elaboration, and so on in infinite regress'. A more productive approach, he suggests, is to identify the norms of the assessment community through a close examination of the nature of, and reasons for, the actual marking decisions made by tutors. Through this

inductive process it should be possible to identify and to convey the standards which are embedded in the tacit knowledge of a particular assessment community. This is particularly important in institutions where unitisation and semesterisation allow for a multiplicity of practices to develop in parallel. Lecturers marking relatively small units can establish their own conventions and marking practices which are not exposed through the second marking process. These differences often only come to light in large units with multiple markers or in relation to dissertation supervision, and, where they do so, institutional structures create pressures for disagreements to be quickly resolved for the student and for the external examiner.

Some of the differences in practice and approach that were identified in the research findings are, I would argue, not the product of incommensurable disciplinary discourses, but simply a reflection of the institutional practices and procedures which govern marking. The practice of assessment is a highly individualised one, at least in the particular department and discipline that formed the focus of this study. Students, even when working with other students on the same project, are usually assigned an individual mark based on their own contribution and plagiarism policies provide strong disincentives to working collaboratively on the production of assignments. The subsequent work is marked by members of staff on their own (often retreating home or to another private space) and although some of the scripts are subsequently seen by second markers, the assessment regime is set up to verify rather than to challenge academic judgement.

A preliminary step is therefore to provide opportunities for staff themselves to develop common understandings through observation, participation and dialogue (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Firstly, there may be opportunities for making marking more of a public or a shared activity. For example, the use of 'marking bees' for the joint marking of scripts allows for staff to compare opinions and discuss issues during the marking and feedback process (Price, 2005). Secondly, fundamental differences in marks should be seen not as a threat to the integrity of the programme or to the validity of the marking process, but as an opportunity to investigate the reasons underpinning the differences in approach. An analogy can be drawn with 'hard cases' in legal

jurisprudence (Dworkin, 1975). This term applies to very difficult cases where existing rules cannot be mechanically applied, and which in jurisprudential terms are seen as an opportunity to investigate or to rethink underlying legal principles. Current institutional policies, dominated by a scientific discourse of objectivity and validity and a quality assurance discourse which promotes reliability and audit, tend to obscure these sorts of differences. Second marking becomes simply mark verification and disagreements are kept private.

A second element of the strategy is staff development. A starting point would be to have course-level or programme-level discussions in relation to establishing what views are in relation to acceptable forms of knowledge and representation practices within the discipline. What sources of knowledge are acceptable within the discipline and is there a preferred hierarchy? For example, should students be looking for theoretical support or to empirical evidence in the first instance? When looking for sources of evidence, are particular types ruled in or out, for example internet sources, or newspapers? This exercise is not necessarily expected to result in a consensus which can apply across all units and disciplines – it is a rare discipline indeed, where a course team would be able to agree on all of these issues. However, it provides the basis upon which to share some of this tacit knowledge with students and to highlight or flag up areas where there might be lack of consensus or certainty.

An alternative or supplementary strategy for explicating some of this tacit knowledge would be through the use of discourse analysis of written feedback that is given to students within a particular unit or course. As the transcription and analysis of patterns within feedback in this thesis has shown, this provides a useful way to identify underlying discourse, assumptions and conventions in particular contexts. It provides an opportunity for questioning hegemonic or conventional practices within the discipline and for showing how taken-for-granted practices can be explored and made visible. It also has the advantage of enabling discussions about shared aims and tacit assumptions to be had without identifying or singling out particular members of staff. These practical strategies to uncover some of the tacit knowledge underpinning judgements about marking and feedback might provide valuable information about

the norms, conventions and practices of the discipline that can then be passed on to students. Alternatively Johns' (1997) work on 'students as researchers' suggests a way of getting students to investigate the academic setting in which they are writing and the values and expectations which underlie the texts they are being asked to produce.

A further point is that more attention needs to be paid by higher education lecturers and institutions to issues of identity and epistemology. Considerable attention is paid within institutional discourses to the student and to processes and procedures but not to the member of academic staff who is writing the feedback or to the relationship between the writers and readers of feedback. This, together with the anonymity of feedback, promotes the industrialisation of the assessment process and may contribute to students' dissatisfaction with feedback (Crook, et al., 2006). Epistemological issues are also somewhat neglected at undergraduate level. Discussions of what epistemology actually means in terms of the day-to-day practice of the subject – what counts as good or appropriate knowledge, what the hierarchies of sources are in the subject and how it should be appropriately represented is an integral part of the discipline, not just a decontextualised study skills issue. It also needs to be made clear to students that these issues are not necessarily settled within a particular department or discipline and that there are areas of contestation. Nevertheless, explaining the underpinning principles and identifying the areas of debate can be a useful way into discussing some of the key issues in a particular subject area.

A potential critique of these strategies for improving professional practice is that they may simply reinforce existing patterns of knowledge construction and representation within the academy. A central criticism of the communities of practice approach is that issues of power, authority and structure tend to be unacknowledged and under-theorised. The approach does not account for how particular groups of students may be excluded or marginalised from the process of legitimate peripheral participation (Clark & Ivanic, 1997; Lillis, 2001) or how dominant literacy practices may serve as a barrier to engagement rather than as a shared resource (Lea, 2005). The development of a more coherent set of shared standards may make for fairer assessment practices,

but does not challenge the role of the university in defining and reifying particular forms of literacy practices.

However, the poststructuralist conception of power relations as a decentralised, diffuse and unstable network of practices affords the possibility of subversion: 'where there is power, there is also resistance' (Foucault, 1978). Burke and Jackson (2007), for example, argue that writing practices can act as a form of resistance. The development of more imaginative assessment and feedback practices might therefore enable students to explore alternative ways of representing knowledge. Whilst there is considerable diversity of assessment within the criminology department, the written remains privileged over the oral, with presentations often accounting for a small percentage of the mark. In at least one unit, marks achieved in presentations have been moderated downwards because they were 'too good', which suggests that this method of performing and representing knowledge is deemed less legitimate, at least at undergraduate level. Burke and Jackson's (2007) proposal is to create space for students and teachers to consider the implications of different writing and assessment practices and to conceptualise writing as part of a meaning-making process rather than just a neutral mechanism for assessment. Drawing on Richardson's (1994) notion of writing as a method of inquiry, they advocate a more critical approach to how knowledge is presented and in which the teaching of academic writing is part of a wider emancipatory pedagogical project.

## 6.5    Final Reflections

Although the focus of this thesis has been on the role that academic staff play in regulating student writing practices, there are several broad themes that have emerged from the study which are also relevant to my experience of undertaking the professional doctorate. The first is the relationship between academic and professional knowledge. All doctoral degrees, both PhDs and professional doctorates, are awarded for 'the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication' (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2008, p.23). Nevertheless, there are some reservations about the equivalence of the

awards, both in the academic community and in the professions (A. Lee, Brennan, & Green, 2009). Some of the concerns about parity between quality and standards have been traced to differences in the time requirements for completion, entry qualifications and the length of the final thesis (Neumann, 2005; Pearson, 1999). However, debates over the equivalence between the PhD and the professional doctorate can also be seen to have an epistemological dimension, in that they are concerned with what constitutes a legitimate source of knowledge. Whilst professional doctorate students are undoubtedly engaged in the creation of new knowledge, this may include informal, situated and contingent knowledge generated through professional practice (Eraut, 1994, 2000) rather than with the more formal disciplinary-based knowledge of the academy (Becher & Trowler, 2001).

A second central concern of this thesis has been how knowledge is represented, and I have discussed in Chapter 2 why I have adopted a conventional realist narrative in the thesis. However, the use of a thesis and viva as a mode of assessment for professional doctorates might also be seen as further evidence of a 'colonisation' model (Scott, et al., 2004) in which academic modes of representing knowledge take precedence over other methods of communication and dissemination. Maxwell (2003) suggests that this is characteristic of 'first generation' professional doctorates, which are understandably hesitant to challenge the institutional status quo. However, as professional doctorates become more established, he suggests that 'second generation' doctorates offer a more radical potential to reshape the academic and professional partnerships. In second generation professional doctorates the 'realities of the workplace, the knowledge and the improvement of the profession and the rigour of the university are being brought together in new relationships' (Maxwell, 2003, p.290). This is reflected in alternative assessment strategies more suited to the assessment of different types of knowledge generation, including, for example, a portfolio of different outputs or disseminating results to practitioners.

A third issue that has threaded through this thesis is the limited scope for the enactment of the personal in higher education. It is here that I feel that my experience of doing the professional doctorate has been quite different, in that the programme

has provided the space for reflection on and discussion of, the emotional aspects of the doctoral journey. This is, in part, due to the course leaders and my supervisors, who have encouraged a reflexive approach to the research and to the writing of the thesis. However, Wenger's (1998, p.6) observation that 'the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that belongs to...communities of practice' is especially apt here. The informal learning opportunities that arose from seminar discussions, coffee breaks and social events were extremely important in developing my ideas and perspectives. However, it was the friendships that developed between six members of the cohort, sustained through hundreds of messages that were exchanged through a social networking site, which provided the practical and emotional support to get the research completed and the thesis written. The value of the peer learning group was such that we presented a joint conference paper which explored the pedagogical implications of our own experience for development of communities of learning in other contexts (Chandler-Grevatt, et al., 2008)

Undertaking the EdD has had a considerable impact on my intellectual and professional development and on my identity as a lecturer. When I began the EdD I had just been appointed to a junior manager-academic role and, although I had a small number of publications in the criminology field, I saw my role primarily in terms of teaching and academic leadership. My primary motivation in registering on the programme was to equip myself with the knowledge base to make more informed decisions about matters relating to curriculum and quality assurance. Whilst I now do feel more qualified in doing so, undertaking the degree has had more unexpected career consequences. I was seconded to a central department for three years to lead on a project promoting undergraduate research in the curriculum; I spent six weeks on a learning and teaching exchange programme at the Center for Research in Higher Education at Nagoya University in Japan; and I became a course adviser for staff undertaking the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. I also presented at several national and international writing and higher education conferences (Creaton, 2006d, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d, 2009, 2010a, 2010b) and these, together with my membership of the Centre for Education and Equity Research

(CHEER) at the University of Sussex, gave me the opportunity to immerse myself in new academic communities of practice.

As I come to the end of this thesis, I have just taken up another more senior management post as Associate Dean (Academic) in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Portsmouth. This means that some of the opportunities for doing research will be reduced. However, I bring to my new post the knowledge, skills and values that I have acquired in the course of doing the doctorate; a greater understanding of the higher education policies and context; a critical approach to the underlying discourses and ideologies that underpin the curriculum; and a reflexive approach to my own professional practice.

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**APPENDIX 1: List of Courses offered by ICJS**

UNDERGRADUATE

*Full- time campus*

BSc (Hons) Criminology and Criminal Justice

BSc (Hons) Criminology and Forensic Studies

BSc (Hons) Criminology with Psychology

LLB Law and Criminology (Combined Honours, based in the School of Law)

BSc (Hons) Sociology and Criminology (Combined Honours, based in the School of
Social, Historical and Literary Studies)

*Part-time distance-learning*

FdA Investigation and Evidence

FdA Police Studies

BSc (Hons) Counter Fraud and Criminal Justice Studies

BSc (Hons) Crime and Criminology

BSc (Hons) Risk and Security Management

TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE

*Full-time campus*

MSc Criminology and Community Safety

MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice

MSc Criminology and Criminal Psychology

MSc Criminology and Crime Cultures

MSc Security Management

*Part-time distance-learning awards (fully online)*

MSc International Criminal Justice

MSc Policing, Policy and Leadership

*Part-time distance-learning awards (supported online)*

MSc Counter Fraud and Counter Corruption Studies

MSc Criminology and Community Safety

MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice

MSc Criminology and Criminal Psychology

MSc Security Management


RESEARCH DEGREES

PhD (full- and part-time)

Doctorate in Criminal Justice (DCrimJ)


PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

BA (Hons) Community Justice

**APPENDIX 2: List of Units Sampled**

| Unit Code | Unit Name | No of Samples | Range | Artefact | Level | Credits | Course | Mode | C/O |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| U09466C | Study Skills | 11 | Fail-68 | 2000 word essay | 1 | 10 | DLUG | PTDL | Core |
| U0155C | Criminology Study Group | 7 | 0-76 | Article Review | 1 | 10 | FTUG | FTCB | Core |
| | | 7 | 48-74 | Reflective commentary | 1 | 10 | FTUG | FTCB | Core |
| U11422B | Learning Management Unit 1 | 21 | Pass/Fail | 2000 word reflective report | 1 | 10 | Probation | FTDL | Core |
| U11799 | Introduction to Law and Legal Skills | 10 | 30-74 | 2000 word coursework | 1 | 10 | DLUG | PTDL | Core |
| U15059 | Understanding Society and Social Problems | 3 | 55-64 | 2000 word essays | 1 | 20 | DLUG | PTDL | Core |
| U16358 | Introduction to Criminology and Criminal Justice | 12 | 32-74 | 2000 word essay | 1 | 20 | DLUG | PTDL | Core |
| U01562 | Workplace Violence | 7 | 50-70 | Essay | 2 | 10 | DLUG | PTDL | Option |
| U10864 | Police Operations and Policing Processes | 5 | 54-68 | 2000 word essay | 2 | 20 | Foundation Degree | PTDL | Core |
| U09892D | Issues in Criminology | 8 | 28-78 | 2000 word essay | 2 | 20 | DLUG | PTDL | Core |

| Unit Code | Unit Name | No of Samples | Range | Artefact | Level | Credits | Course | Mode | C/O |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| U11803 | The Psychology of Criminal Justice | 11 | 25-67 | 2000 word essay | 2 | 20 | DLUG | PTDL | Option |
| U15087 | Criminalistics 1 | 12 | 17-78 | Crime Scene Report | 2 | 20 | FTUG | FTCB | Core |
| U08556B | Gender, Crime and Criminal Justice | 6 | 33-74 | 2000 word essay | 2 | 10 | FTUG | FTCB | Option |

**APPENDIX 3: List of Informants**

| Pseudonym | Department |
| --- | --- |
| A | Criminology |
| B | Criminology |
| C | Criminology |
| D | Criminology |
| E | Criminology |
| F | Criminology |
| G | Law |
| H | Law |
| I | Law |
| J | Law |
| K | Psychology |
| L | Psychology |
| M | Psychology |
| N | Psychology |
| O | Sociology |
| P | Sociology |
| Q | Sociology |
| R | Sociology |

**APPENDIX 4: Interview Schedule**

1. What type of writing is involved in the unit?  What guidance is given to students on the requirements?

2. Is this typical of the type of assignments that are set in psychology/criminology/law/sociology?  What other types of writing assignments are set? How familiar are students with this type of writing before they arrive?  What is the role of essays?

3. What writing conventions are used in psychological/criminological/legal/sociological writing? e.g. personal/impersonal, objective/subjective, passive/active, first/third person, paraphrasing and use of quotations, referencing, use of figure, tables and graphs, headings and subheadings - do conventions differ by discipline or sub-discipline? Are things changing?

4. What types of evidence are valid/encouraged?  Is there a hierarchy? e.g. Empirical research - experimental etc, qualitative research, theory, other sources - newspapers, websites, own research, personal experience

5. How do you think the requirements/conventions for criminology might differ from psychology/law/sociology?  Have you noticed any differences between single/combined honours students in performance etc?

## APPENDIX 5: Assessment Coversheet

### INSTITUTE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE STUDIES

University of **Portsmouth**

**Level 1**    Coursework Feedback Sheet

| Student Number | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Course Title | | | |
| Unit Title | | | |
| Part Number | 1 / 2    (if appropriate) | Question No. | (if appropriate) |
| Assignment Title | | | |
| Date of Submission | | Word Count | (must be completed) |

**COMMENTS**
(These should embrace the use of relevant and accurate information, demonstration of understanding and application of knowledge, understanding and use of relevant theory where applicable and overall presentation, including accuracy of references, bibliography, spelling and grammar.)

**MAIN STRENGTHS:**

**AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

**OTHER COMMENTS:**

| Mark: | % |
|---|---|

1st Marker  PRINT NAME: ...................................... SIGNATURE: ............................................. DATE: ..................

2nd Marker  PRINT NAME: ...................................... SIGNATURE: ............................................. DATE: ..................

Please look at the resources available on the Skills@Portsmouth Victory site    ☐

Check how to accurately reference using the following site: http://referencing.port.ac.uk    ☐

PLEASE NOTE: GRADES ARE PROVISIONAL, SUBJECT TO MODERATION AND WILL BE CONFIRMED AT THE EXAMINATION BOARD

## Grade Criteria (Level 1)

**General criteria applicable to essays, reports, projects (some aspects) etc.** content, structure, organisation, expression, discussion, explanation, accuracy, grammar, spelling, punctuation and use of references / bibliography.

| | |
|---|---|
| 80 % + | Excellent work, which is well argued, structured, intelligent and that shows evidence of thorough research, analysis, organisation and expression. Shows originality or creativity of approach and a clear, well articulated understanding of the subject matter. Few or no errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Accurate citation and use of references. |
| 70 – 79% | Very good work which is clearly written, well argued and covers the subject matter in a thorough, thoughtful and competent manner, with good evidence of research and good use of source material. Contains some originality of approach, insight or synthesis. Few errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and use of references |
| 60 - 69% | A very good, well presented piece of work covering much of the subject matter and which is clearly and lucidly written but lacking in one or more aspects such as: content, structure, organization, expression, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Evidence of research in the topic area and good use of sources and references. |
| 50 – 59% | Good, work but lacking in two or more of the following, presentation, content, structure, organization, expression, discussion and explanation. Work in this range tends to exhibit some deficiencies in prose style, grammar and citation and use of references, but contains evidence of a fairly good understanding of the topic area. Evidence of research in the topic area but often poor use or presentation of the material A tendency to be over- descriptive at the expense of analysis, or weak prose style is often a feature and the majority of students would normally be expected to fall within this range. |
| 40 - 49% | Adequate work that demonstrates some understanding of the topic area and some evidence of research but which is weak in some or most of the following: presentation, content, structure, organisation, expression, discussion and explanation. Work in this range tends to exhibit deficiencies in prose style, grammar and citation and use of references, but contains evidence of enough work and thought to avoid failure. |
| 30 - 39% | **FAIL** Work in this range attempts to address the question/problem but is substantially incomplete and deficient. Serious problems with a number of aspects of language use are often found in work in this range and the work may be severely under-length and/or fails to grasp the nature of the topic matter. Content, analysis, expression, structure and use of sources will be very weak or missing |
| 0 – 29% | **VERY POOR FAIL** No serious attempt to address the question or problem, and/or manifests a serious misunderstanding of the requirements of the assignment. Acutely deficient in all aspects. |

**PLEASE NOTE:** All assignments must be referenced using Harvard APA style and have a bibliography / reference list. An assignment that does not have a bibliography or fails to use the Harvard APA referencing and citation system will automatically receive a maximum of 40% at Level 1 and 0% at Levels 2, 3 or at Masters' Level. Please also note that you may lose up to 10 marks for incorrect referencing and demonstrating poor bibliographical skills. All assignments must have a word count indicated. All work must be submitted within the range of 10% plus or minus the word count set out in the relevant assignment question. Please consult the ICJS Departmental Handbook for a more detailed explanation of the relevant penalties for word counts, referencing and plagiarism.

### ICJS Feedback Charter

- Feedback provided to students will be presented in a constructive, respectful and supportive manner.
- Feedback provided to students will, as far as is practicable, identify areas of strength and/or aspects of the work which relate to good practice.
- Feedback provided to students will, as far as is practicable, identify areas where improvement could have been made, both in terms of subject matter and writing/presentation style.
- Where marks have been deducted for specific reasons, these reasons will be identified in the feedback and justified by stated criteria and protocols.
- All relevant sections of the feedback form will be completed in full and additional comments will be sufficiently detailed to enable students to fully understand the rationale behind the mark awarded.

**If you have any comments or queries on your feedback please contact the first marker in the first instance.**

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