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in the Academywriting identities,
Academy

Author: Sue Dymoke and Jane Spiro

Sue Dymoke and Jane Spiro consider poets working in the academy. From a qualitative study, they show how there are multiple, challenging – occasionally affirming – competing versions of the self as academic and poet.

Abstract

This paper reports on a pilot project which investigates the writing identity construction, writing practices and experiences of 17 authors from varied subject disciplines in higher education, whose publications include poetry and academic writing. We have defined the writers as poet-academics or academic-poets according to their perceptions of place of comfort, default position or natural “go-to” place as a writer. We consider the writing practices and experiences of both groups: poet-academics who see their primary writing as poetry (but who also write academic research and other prose forms) and academic-poets who view their primary writing as academic research (but who also write and publish poetry). Given that these two groups have different writing priorities and write from different generic starting points, we question how such authors construct their identities as writers within the Academy and consider if and how they experience these different writing selves as a separation. We explore the contrasting writing challenges, pressures and pleasures apparent in these two domains, reflect on synergies in practice and point to potential implications for research accountability, writing, mentoring and professional development within institutions.

Keywords: academic identity, communities of practice, poetry identity, writing identity, writing poetry, writing practices

Introduction

We, the authors of this paper, are writers of published poetry and academic texts (both research and pedagogic) who work in university faculties of Education. Discussion of our writing experiences within and beyond academic contexts led us to question the tensions we experienced between writing as a poet and writing as an academic and then to investigate whether these reflected a wider experience within our writing communities. We explored how we internalize the writing conventions of our academic communities and the impact they have on our writing processes. Our academic communities are defined as both subject disciplinary, oriented towards practice or research, and located within different research paradigms.

We considered how we choose to present ourselves to audiences through written words and the way these words are received by audiences with their varying degrees of power over our work. We questioned how:

- we write and the personal value placed on the different types of writing we are engaged in;
- we disseminate or perform our texts;
- our various poetic and academic outputs are received by the communities that we work in and to which we “belong”.

We quickly discovered marked similarities (and some differences) in our writing experiences and started to examine whether our personal writing stories might be mirrored or contrasted by other academics who write and publish poetry along with research and pedagogic texts.

We were interested to learn how other writers construct their writing identities within the Academy. For example, had they encountered similar challenges and/or enjoyed the same pleasures in writing that we had or did their experiences differ? We wanted to tease out any contrasts and/or synergies between apparent poetic and academic ways of being a writer. Given our roles as teacher educators within the fields of first and second English language education, we soon began to consider whether research in this area might usefully inform and support the writing development of future/other poet-academics or academic-poets. This paper reports on a pilot project, developed from these areas of concern. It involved discussions with university-based authors of both poetic and

academic texts. Our findings raise questions about authors' perceptions of themselves as writers and the reception and status of their written texts that, potentially, have implications for professional development and research accountability within the higher education sector.

Writing as making, writing as the self: a review of the literature

We start by exploring what our reading in the field tells us about identity construction in the Academy and, particularly, academics who are poets. This reading terrain addresses conceptual questions about: academic identity and identity construction through academic writing; poetic identity and identity construction through poetry writing; communities of writing practice within these fields and the role of audiences in the process. We focus specifically on the single and multiple identities of individuals in higher education and how, through their academic and poetic writing, their distinctive voices are created, enacted and received.

Academic Identity

Becher and Trowler (2001) explore the notion of subject disciplines as communities of practice to which academics claim membership by reflecting the community's dominant discourse and internalizing its culture and values. They compare academic disciplines to tribes whose structures are partially visible at the surface – through such features as language and discourse patterns – but whose underpinning values, beliefs and practices may not be fully revealed. Would-be tribe members need to develop knowledge of the “Machiavellian rules of conduct” (2001: 50) in order to fully join the tribe. Furthermore, each tribe's discourse conventions are shaped by disciplinary knowledge including how knowledge is represented through selection and organization of the written word. Harris (2005) and Taylor (2008) argue that the dominance of scholarly tribes is less apparent in neo-liberal times of high stakes and accountability when academics must continually refine and review how they work, who they work with and how they present their work to others. Nevertheless, for Harris (2005), academic identity, albeit a reconstructed identity, remains much more firmly rooted in subject discipline than in the institution as a whole. Gee observes that once someone has gained access to a tribe it is impossible to step back and communicate less fluently: to do so would be to signal that “at best you are a pretender or a beginner” (Gee 1990: 155 as cited in Ivanic 1998).

Researchers note the increasing division between a professional's self-perception and how their academic identities are represented or prescribed (Churchman and King 2009; Malcolm and Zukas 2009; Billot 2010) by institutions which are increasingly market-driven, overtly managerial in structure and responsive to policy and governmental directives. Billot (2010) reflects on tensions, provoked by the introduction of the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) in two tertiary institutions in New Zealand. Similarly, Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) – rounds 1 and 2 – and the Research Assessment Framework (REF) of 2014 and its forerunner, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of 2010 in the UK, continue to have major impacts on how the work of individual academics, including many in our study, is positioned, perceived and rewarded within and beyond their home institutions (Dobele and Rundle-Thiele 2015; Moriarty 2016).

For Billot (2010), academic and professional identities co-exist and are concerned both with membership of an organization and membership of the academic profession. She notes the commitment to practice and supervision of practice demonstrated by academics working in Education, and Nursing and Design, which are viewed as a priority for their students' professional development. Such commitments are carried out at the expense of academics' own research and, consequently, can lead to feelings of alienation from their institutions. In reflecting on REF 2014, Scott argues that REF judgement “is likely to set colleague against colleague.... may have the effect of creating different cadres of academics, those who can contribute to the exercise and those who teach” (2015: 13).

Research about academic identity points to the tensions in maintaining multiple or hybrid identities as academics transition from one role to another (Hill 2006; Lea and Stierer 2011) or strive to fulfil multiple institutional roles (Kosnik et al. 2013; Myhill 2015). Myhill (2015) notes the increasing division between those engaged in writing research and those involved in Initial Teacher Education. Kosnik et al. focus on the dual identities adopted by literacy educators who are academics in Schools of Education and required to teach, research and publish. Their respondents strove to maintain credibility in both contexts in order to maintain professional status amongst professional teacher education colleagues and simultaneously develop/sustain a university career.

Throughout the literature, construction of academic identity and identity per se are viewed as fluid, moving over unstable ground and in constant “flux” (Lea and Stierer 2011: 613) between self and other. Identity as a poet and an academic is “part of the lived complexity of a person's project” (Clegg 2008: 29), and a perpetual path of “becoming” (Brogden 2010: 370). Lee and Boud describe academics as continually “making and remaking” identities (2003: 189), which are contingent on past and future personal events as well as those “imagined and projected” (Billot 2010: 712). What it means to be a member of a particular discipline and the possible ways in which this could be articulated are both changing (Malcolm and Zukas 2009; Lea and Stierer 2011). Therefore, the individual academic needs to be able to reflect these changes through production of published writing outcomes – whether these be digital poetry collections, comparative literary studies or research on aspects of pedagogy – that meet institutional and disciplinary requirements.

Constructing academic identity through writing

Ivanic (1998) identifies three ways of thinking about identity in relation to writing: the “autobiographical self” brought to the writing; the “discoursal self”, created in the act of writing, and the “self as author” (Ivanic 1998: 30) of the written content. Writers may inhabit all of these selves depending on the social contexts in which

they are writing. Thus, identity is constructed through the “literate activities” and “linguistic choices” made in carrying them out (1998: 64). Furthermore, Ivanic questions where someone's identity is located and when its construction actually takes place. For Ivanic, a writing identity could be influenced by past events or experiences, linguistic choices, attitudes towards the discourse community and decisions made as result (1998).

The search for voice which authentically embodies one's own and/or the research participants' stories is a key issue for researchers to address. Richardson (1997) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explore how their own voices can be included in their research writing. Richardson questions how she and other academics, hired by institutions that “may adhere to older canons of writing practices”, are able to “write ourselves into our texts with intellectual and spiritual integrity and at the same time lay claim to 'knowing' something” (Richardson 1997: 2). She argues that, by constructing the illusion of an objective narrative voice in academic writing, “we separate our humanity from the work. We create the conditions of our own alienation” (Richardson 1997:19). For example, Potgieter and Smit report their experience as academics in which the more “convoluted... abstruse” (2009: 226) the scholarly writing, the more seriously it appears to be judged. Writing for publication emerges clearly as the way in which academics acquire power in their organizations (Lea and Stierer 2011: 605).

Ivanic (1998) and Richardson (1997) have both articulated ways in which academic writing reveals and shapes identity. They have done so by elucidating their personal textual reasoning (Richardson 1997: 12-22) and linguistic choices (Ivanic 1998: 30-31) as they create texts. This meta-writing is an element of their identity construction. It has inspired and spurred both authors of this current paper to explore new ways in which we could encourage other writers working in academic contexts to reflect on the different roles they play as writers: for example, by considering how our editing of poetry has informed the way we edit other genres too.

For the purposes of this paper, our definition of an “academic writer” has been informed by the above literature and arrived at through consideration of our participants' outputs and audiences. They may have written and published research papers in peer-reviewed journals and/or had conference presentations published in books of proceedings. They may be monograph or textbook authors whose works are used in higher education. They may also have written editorials or professional journal articles about their research. Writers in the sample are all, to differing extents, visible in these public domains, through publication, performance or external readership. Each participant is in a different state or stage of becoming an academic.

The poet's identity

The poet Philip Gross states “there is always an identity, a presence performed for others, at stake when a writer speaks about their work” (Gross 2011: 51). Some writers prefer to avoid using the noun “poet” to describe their occupation. O'Driscoll's (2006) collection of poetry quotations indicates that numerous contemporary writers are concerned about how they will be received if they describe themselves as poets. “Poet” seems to be associated with a mixture of sainthood, concealment, and embarrassment (Longley 2003; Dunn 2000; Keinzahler 2003 as cited in O'Driscoll 2006). Lavinia Greenlaw prefers to tell people she is a writer “because telling people you are a poet compels them to go into nervous detail about why they neither read it nor understand it” (O'Driscoll 2006: 68).

Childhood experiences and social class/culture considerations also impact on writers' perceptions. For example, Tom Leonard perceives the poetry of his schooldays as linked to a cultural elite and “nothing to do with me” (Leonard 2009: 37) whereas Edwin Muir (1962) and Seamus Heaney both perceive it as a vital element within their cultures, “a restoration of the culture to itself” (Heaney 1980: 60). Some poets have regarded poetry writing as a unique, self-conscious engagement of body, spirit and text that distinguishes them from historians or prose writers. Readings and misreadings of “genius” and “inspiration” have been a factor in the way poets are seen and see themselves. Keats teases out his own definitions of poetry and genius in painstaking letters to friends. He writes to Bailey that “Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neural intellect” (Keats 1975: 36). Similarly, Wordsworth distinguishes the poet as “a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply” (1963: 246). More recent researchers and psychologists have sought to understand where giftedness sits within the neural wiring of the mind (Geake 2007). They contradict the romantic view that creative talent belongs only to the privileged (Boden 1990; Weisberg 1993). For Freud, creativity lay within the capacity of everyone and, far from being an indicator of elevated thought, “is a continuation of and a substitute for what was once the play of childhood” (1986: 41). Thus we have two opposing perceptions of creativity as a romantic, Keatsian godliness, versus creativity as “a kind of self-indulgent escapism” (Pope on Freud 2005: 71).

Constructing poetic identity through writing

Octavio Paz sees poet and poem as existing in a symbiotic relationship where “the poet is a creation of the poem as much as the poem is a creation of the poet” (Paz 2013). He argues that the poet does not exist before the poem. Kenneth Koch adopts Paul Valery's view of poetry as “a language within a language” (Koch 1998: 19-20), a discrete mode of expression, in a constant state of flux and subject to change when used well. It begins with wordplay (Heaney 1980) and is a language that the writer needs to become “fluent” in and make their own (Herbert 2012: 8). Percy Bysshe Shelley viewed poetry as an active mode of thinking which enlarged the imagination by “replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight” (Shelley 2008). For Heaney, citing Robert Frost, poetry composition begins at the pre-verbal stage: “a poem begins as a lump in the throat, a homesickness, a lovesickness. It finds the thought and the thought finds the words” (Heaney 1980: 49). In this vein, Thom Gunn describes writing poetry as “exploration” (Haffenden 1981: 36) leading to insights about self and subject matter. The notion

of poetry as investigation also appears in reflections by 21st century poets, including Tom Warner for whom “a poem is a discovery” (2012: 1). Many writers convey a sense that they need to be in a state of readiness, to tune into themselves and be alert to the fact that a new poem might be about to begin to reveal itself (Greig 2012; Haffenden 1981). It would seem, therefore, that, in common with the academic described by Brogden (2010) above, the poet could also be said to be in a constant state of becoming.

Even if a poet appears reluctant to give themselves this label, the question remains: what compels a person to choose to express themselves habitually through the medium of poetry. Why do they make that choice? For some poets the act of writing is akin to capturing a moment. For Coleridge, capturing this moment is described in quasi-religious terms as “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation” (Coleridge 1971: 167). Philip Larkin rejects the idea that emotion alone could lead one to write a poem. He wrote poetry to preserve something thought, felt or seen and “because it's something you've got to get done” (Haffenden 1981: 122). Eavan Boland describes the “vital” moment when she encountered the “sheer force and enclosure of the language of poetry” as a young writer and the journey this took her on towards becoming a poet (1996: 85). Other poets are attracted by the “distillation of experience” (Lorde 1977: 418), the intense compression of language in poetry or the “fuse” (Holub 1987: 54) that can be lit to trigger a reaction through use of poetic language. Seamus Heaney talks of how memory can “unexpectedly open the writing channels and get you going” (O'Driscoll 2008: 16). His poem “Digging” was written in response to a “phonic prompt, a kind of sonic chain dictated by the inner ear” (82). For him the motivation or prompt to write a poem is latent, and exerts almost a spiritual control over the writer. This pre-verbal, primal view is echoed by Gillian Clarke who describes poetry as “grounded in earliest experiences... stored in the senses rather than the filing-system of the conscious mind” (Clarke 2008: 9). For her, a poem's words emerge from the connection forged at this “wellspring” (ibid.) of language.

What, therefore, constitutes a poet for the purposes of this study? Prior to commencement of the study, the writers in our sample have all self-identified as writers of poetry, albeit with varying degrees of acceptance of the term. Their work has a visible and/or audible output which has been validated in some way through selection by an external editor and publication in a poetry magazine or website, in an anthology or single collection and, in most cases, through performance to an audience. According to their own testimony, their writing sits within the expressive scale and is “more shaped and organised, heightening or intensifying the implicit” (Britton 1970: 177). However, discussions in this paper will seek to interrogate this definition further.

Communities of practice in academic and poetic writing

In considering communities to which academics belong, it is no longer sufficient to think of “disciplines” as the overarching organizational structure. Not only are “disciplines” in a state of continuous redefinition (Malcolm and Zukas 2009), new frames of reference have come into focus including more generic categories such as graduate attributes, employability criteria and broad learning outcomes. Lave and Wenger's description of “communities of practice” (1991) gave fresh articulation to the paradigm shift in adult learning. Learning does not only take place within the dyad of teacher-student, it involves “active social participation” (Hughes et al. 2007: 3) and acknowledges that learners achieve more in collaboration with others:

A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a **network of connections** between people. It has an identity defined by a **shared domain** of interest. Membership therefore implies a **commitment to the domain**, and therefore a **shared competence** that distinguishes members from other people (Wenger 2009).

In this paper, we invoke the notion of “communities of practice” as a framework which explains where the writers have experienced a sense of belonging, how they understood the conventions and expectations of their audience, and how they sought and received recognition. Each part of Wenger's definition above can be expanded in the light of our research as is explored in our findings section.

The role of audience in the writing process

Creation of an authentic voice is viewed by many as being synonymous with identity. However, both voice and identity are constructs. No matter how recognizable a written voice may be, this is not the writer's “real identity” (Elbow 1994). “Audience” is determined not by the individual reader, but by the whole community in which the writer belongs, and the conventions and expectations of reading within it. As we saw above, these conventions and expectations determine how a text is constructed, its language and organization, and how these elements frame messages. Nesi (2012) reports the findings of the British Academic Writing in English (BAWE) research project which analyzed the characteristics of 2000 student pieces of writing judged to be at 2:1 level or above across 12 different subject disciplines. What is interesting are the differences which emerged between the disciplines at the level of language; and how these differences revealed deeper epistemological and ideological positions. The successful student learnt to recognize these surface features, and mirror them for their audience. Those studying combined honours, traversing for example between Literature and Education, found that value judgements would be unacceptable in one and not the other, whilst personal pronouns would be taboo in one and essential in the other. These confusing differences become clear only through careful analysis of the specific writing community, and the way texts are honed within this to meet its specific readership. Also significant is the domain in which a writer writes: the classroom, the conference, for solace, healing or self-knowledge, in preparation for a research paper, to support an argument, polemic or manifesto. These domains, and the text types which emerge from them, demand sensitivity to shared knowledge of the chosen audience; the register, text structure and content that best suits the purpose (Bhatia 1993). The effectiveness of a given text lies in an equal meeting between the writer and the audience, with the writer understanding the latter and honing the voice appropriately.

Thus we map a broad terrain in which we see the poet-academic writer as part of two potential communities of practice and discourse communities, meeting the expectations of two different kinds of audience, yet simultaneously formulating core values about what, why and how they write. Both kinds of writing are clearly important forms of expression for our participants, and it is interesting to ask how and why they make choices between these two, and with what effect on their core message. The section below explains how we have sought to find answers to these questions, and construct a research design that allows for the diversity of participant responses.

Methodology

Our research questions developed from literature pertaining to writing identity, practice and readership. They were refined through reflection on our personal experiences as poets and academics.

Research Questions

1. What are the perspectives of poet-academics and academic-poets about their positioning/status within the Academy? What can we learn about the way in which relationships with colleagues impact on their writing, and vice versa?
2. What are the challenges and tensions about the relative status of these two kinds of writing, poetry and academic writing, and how are these messages about status received? How are these writers challenging assumptions within the academy about “appropriate” writing boundaries? Are these boundaries being breeched and questioned?
 - a) What are the contrasts in their experiences?
 - b) What are the synergies in their experiences?
 - c) Could one group learn from the other?

In addition we were interested to ask how our findings might lead from research to practice and professional development. We were thus led towards two further questions, as a way of examining the practical implications of our findings:

3. How could our research contribute to and/or challenge practices/systems regarding the place of writing within institutional frameworks?
4. What are implications of our research for supporting academics' professional development?

Participants

Our participants consisted of 17 poet-academics who self-identified as:

- actively engaged in the process of writing academically within the higher education research community in the English-speaking world and are familiar with past or current academic peer reviewing and/or research auditing processes; *and*
- actively engaged in writing as a poet and in the process of publishing and/or performing their work.

No financial incentive was offered for voluntary participation but a perceived reward was the development of shared understandings that could support writers working in both creative and academic domains. The conduct of the research adhered to British Educational Research Association (BERA) and institutional ethical guidelines. The writers gave their informed consent to participate in the knowledge they would be free to withdraw at any time (or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied) and their identities would be anonymized unless they preferred to be named. All participants chose anonymity and have been assigned pseudonyms in our reporting.

The size of the sample was limited both for pragmatic reasons and by the essential criteria. However, it was important to us that respondents came from a range of institutions and subject disciplines, in order to eliminate the possibility or perception that the data was solely context or discipline-specific. The sample respondents are affiliated in different ways to twelve HEIs and academic institutions located in a variety of international locations including New Zealand, the US and the UK. They include writers from nine subject disciplines: Applied Linguistics, Botany, Education, English Language, English Literature, Fine Arts, History, Information Technology and Social Work. They have a wide range of experience in both poetry and academic contexts. Their poetry experiences include: publication in poetry journals, single authored pamphlets and poetry collections; winning poetry prizes; giving public readings and performances; poetry exhibitions; editing poetry anthologies and judging poetry competitions. Their academic experiences include: writing doctoral theses, research papers, conference presentations, book proposals, grant bids, pedagogic and academic publications in the form of books, chapters, journals and reports; peer reviewing; editing academic journals and books.

They were recruited to participate in the research in two different ways, either through:

1. direct and personal invitation (to selected informants, who appeared to match the above criteria above);
2. general invitation (issued via academic networks including the National Teaching Fellowship network and specific research/professional academic associations).

Research design

In establishing our research design, we challenged ourselves to devise research tools that would enable us to listen to the testimonies of others, and recognize both patterns/parallels and also the distinctiveness of each account. We drafted a series of semi-structured interview questions aimed to trigger narratives about personal writing histories, writing processes and decision-making, and piloted these questions with one another. Our mutual responses enabled us to identify and compare themes/patterns in each other's answers, and then to adapt our initial questions to be more finely-grained and open-ended. As a result of this process, four broad question areas emerged as below.

Questions used in e-mail and face-to-face interviews

- 1. Different kinds of writing/writing style/writing purpose/writing audience:** How would you describe yourself as a writer? What kind of writing do you engage in most comfortably/naturally? What other writing roles/identities/styles have you developed and why?
- 2. Writing story/history:** What key events have helped to shape your choices and development as a writer?
- 3. Writing – self and other:** How far have others influenced you in your development as a writer?
- 4. Writing and identity:** What do you consider to be your identity – or identities – as a writer? What does the term “writing identity” mean to you?

These questions were communicated to the participants in advance, and they were invited to select e-mail, recorded conversation, or face-to-face interview.

Coding and Analysis

The two researchers independently, and then jointly, arrived at a set of themes which represented broadly the issues raised by the participants. These themes subsequently became a coding tool for data analysis. Through a process of iteration, the themes were refined again after the first coding exercise, as new issues emerged which the original categories failed to represent.

<i>Writer identification with/identity within the writing process – authentic or a game?</i>	<i>(The inner editor)</i>
<i>Crafting, shaping and writing discipline</i>	
<i>Sense of audience - writing for others or self?</i>	
<i>Role of Performance in writing</i>	
<i>Encouragement/support</i>	<i>(The outer editor)</i>
<i>Pleasure/achievement</i>	
<i>Being part of a writing community of practice/learning from others</i>	
<i>Challenges (including rejection, anger, isolation)</i>	
<i>Pressure, constraints from external editors sometimes in conflict with core beliefs</i>	



Table 1: Coding themes

Findings

The findings reported in this paper focus on the writers' identification with/identity within the writing process, the nature of their writing practices and the challenges, pressures and pleasures that they experience when writing in the two genres.

Writer identification with/identity within the writing process

The sample group of writers fell into two distinct groups. One group saw poetry as their first and prime writing

“place” and academic writing as a second, acquired culture or discourse. The other group, conversely, saw academic writing as their first writing domain and poetry as the acquired one. There were eight writers in the first category, who had moved into academic writing for pragmatic reasons and for career enhancement. Seven of these worked in literary, creative arts or arts-based education, including literature, linguistics and social sculpture. Colin, a poet working in Education, was perhaps the most straightforward in describing his writing self. He stated: “Poetry is what I do. That’s the writing I take most seriously, and which I consider the most important.” He offered none of the caveats or signs of embarrassment shown by other respondents about calling himself a poet.

Denise, a poet and sculptor, now felt “comfortable” in her use of the term “poet”, noting that, “I think now I am the age I am I can say I am a poet but I was very superstitious about that”. Daniel, a poet from a Literature faculty was “proud to identify” primarily with the term but only felt able to do so once he had published for the first time. He had always written poems but found that writing more regularly helped him to find the words to deal with problems at work. He regards academic writing as a “game”, one which brings with it acceptance in some “circles”. For him, both labels have different kinds of social cachet. He wants to be associated with the term poet “because it means you are a slightly different character, a quirkiness – it’s a social thing.”

Karla, a poet and Literature lecturer commented that, when presenting herself as a poet, she felt less of a need “to be in some kind of role” but this “projection” of herself also came with feelings of vulnerability, a fear that she would be “side-lined” because of her experimental work. This was exemplified by an acquaintance who advised “don’t go too far that way” after watching her poetry performance. Like some of the poets featured in O’Driscoll (2006), Aidan who works in Education, is embarrassed about introducing himself as a poet: “I can cope with writing it down, but even then it feels false. But poet it is, in terms of identity. I’m comfortable with the practice, not the term.” He also observed an increasing separation between “the poet part of me... and the part of me which needs to get a three star on his next paper.” [i]

There were nine respondents in the second group, who began as academic writers and moved later in their lives into poetry as an acquired domain. Their subject disciplines lay in the social sciences, sciences and humanities, such as Botany, Social Work and History. They began writing poetry because they were either seeking a new means of expression for their ideas or wanted to experience the pleasure in writing poetry as an escape from their paid, work-related writing. Angela, a historian, stated that academic writing came more naturally “because I have done it for 30 years... I have to because of my job”. Her considerable experience meant that, if required, she could “force” herself to write academically but “I can’t force poetry”. She now preferred writing poetry, relishing the “fun” that she associated with the process. Gareth, an academic involved in educational development, explained how he had primarily developed an academic writing style because “professionally it’s what I have to do”. He rarely describes himself as a “writer” when discussing this work but is “comfortable” in calling himself a poet. Nevertheless, he qualified the use of this term by distancing himself from some of its potentially elite connotations (as evoked by Leonard 2009) with the comment, “I’m not part of the literary set and don’t hang out with poets in English departments.”

The separation of self, noted by poet academics Karla and Aidan, is also described by Simon, a botanist, in terms which echo Aidan's observations above. He perceived his poetic and academic writing selves as “almost a split in personalities: rarely do these ‘people’ come together as one”. To illustrate this he recalled an occasion at a professional conference when an audience member realized he was a storyteller she admired. He said it was “as if I was meeting my other self”. Denise, a sculptor engaged in doctoral work, had personally explored the idea of contrasting personae. She developed three writing selves: the writer of erotica; the “feisty... spunky” defiant poet and the “urban indigene” who straddled all three identities. Her PhD marked “a calculated decision” to reverse her feelings of fragmentation and explain her art in both academic and creative ways.

Two participants, whose career paths led them primarily along academic routes, considered that they had neither a sense of different writing selves nor found conflict between the types of writing they engaged in. Ashley commented that “my different kinds of writing are simply different things that I do with language”, while Martin stated that the writing came from different parts of his brain. These individuals were in the minority. Patrick, the second historian in our sample, noted a difference in how much of the self is revealed in the two domains. In his earlier historical writing he was prone to disguise himself “in a veil of objectivity” and wrote about himself as “the author” rather than identifying himself using the “I” pronoun. In spite of his conformity to academic requirements, he still felt “treated like an outsider in the academy – a visitor, a temporary appointment”. He chose not to take courses on academic writing, perceiving that this decision was “part of my outsider mentality”. However, when writing poetry, the self was his starting point.

Both Patrick and social scientist Keris decided to use the medium of poetry as a new way to explore or represent their historical and sociological research. Patrick felt this approach would give his research “more universality and permanent currency”. Keris wanted to “reach out more” with the issues she had written about in other forms. Despite its attractions, writing poetry was not a natural process for either academic. Keris comments that she had to train herself with poetry, “painstakingly”. The view that poetry might be a more lasting medium than the traditional academic paper or monograph, and one that reaches a potentially wider audience, seems highly significant. Through their choices of form these academic-poets are not only questioning what is deemed valid as a research record but how their research might attain longevity and, also, who might read it as a consequence. Their views are pertinent in the light of the research impact agendas that permeate academic discussions, grant applications and reporting processes.

Writing practices

With one exception, *all* the writers, regardless of their primary starting points, identified differences in their approach to crafting and shaping poetry and academic prose texts. Composing poetry was characterized as a much more uncertain process than writing academic prose. For Martin, these differences stemmed from choice of

subject matter and narrative construction. His aim within his poetry writing is to achieve small-scale formal or semantic patterning, figurative language and economy of expression. He considers that his academic writing is consciously motivated by a desire to communicate opinions, to instruct or inform, whereas he does not usually *decide* to write poems – “they just show up”. For Patrick, poetry “could go in several ways”, but in writing prose “you know your purpose and where you are going”. In editing a poem he focuses on the sequence and choice of individual words because it “hinges on that one vowel sound or phrase”. Aidan describes his poetry writing process as holding on to “the vague shadow of meaning at the back of your brain for as long as possible before it vanishes”. He contrasts this experience with writing academic prose where the argument “kind of directs the whole thing forward in a (supposedly) linear fashion”.

Keris and Karla both describe the act of shaping language in poetry as playful. Keris recognizes that she needs “a play space” while Karla finds playing with language enables her to work in “a diverse and energized space” released from concerns about audience or how her work will be received. In a similar vein, Colin expresses the sense that writing a poem occurs unexpectedly and almost wholly in a different dimension: “when I write poems I write out of the unknown into the unknown. My aim as a poet is to write something that’s different from everything else I’ve written”. Originality was, therefore, an important factor for him, coupled with the sense of discovery that emerged through writing, previously acknowledged by Thom Gunn (Haffenden 1981) and Tom Warner (2012).

In describing his poetry writing process in this way, Colin implies that, even within the uncertainty of his emerging draft, he is driven by a purpose, a need for originality within his writing self. This “unknown” endeavour may be difficult but it appears to empower him as a writer and enables him to edit and make judgements about his work. Like Karla, his primary concern is for the integrity of the poetry rather than for its reception. This raises interesting questions about the relative visibility of audience for the two kinds of writing. Several of the participants found poetry to be an opportunity to carve a personal path without reference to their reader. Whether this meant that they were exploring the more subliminal and unacknowledged influence of other poets, or were indeed searching for an entirely personal voice, comments such as these tended to be restricted to the poetry medium. Writing academically did not seem to allow this freedom from audience expectation for most of the writers.

A minority of writers advocated that although the editing processes might be different when working with poetry or prose, certain aspects could be “mutually helpful” for writing in the alternative genre. These aspects were primarily connected with drawing comparisons, achieving precise expression and diction. Keris states that in writing as a poet she “becomes attuned more to seeing analogies” when “writing at a minute level”. Daniel comments that his skills as a poet are useful when he is honing a journal article down to fit a particular word count. In his view, writing in both genres requires “a kind of scrupulousness and care to get it right” but the verification process is different: academic prose is more readily tested and checked against sources than poetry.

Only one writer, Craig, considers there was no difference between his writing approaches. For him each text emerges from a “jumble” of notes that he then considers how best to organize and move towards a draft. In the case of prose, this textual organization is “for a largely unknown and mixed audience”, whereas for the poem the potential audience is not described. As exemplified in Keris’s comment above, considerations of audience appeared to be less of a concern for writers when they were writing in their “go-to” genre in which they already felt some sense of belonging. Nevertheless, each genre still presented numerous challenges.

Writing Challenges and Pressures

The writers commuted, often painfully, within and between academic and poetic discourses and the different values that underpin them. For academic-poets, including Keris above, writing poetry presented new challenges. These challenges were sometimes connected with new audiences and acceptance into a new discourse community. For example, Simon was “disappointed” he had not been more widely accepted by what he describes as the “UK poetry community”. Similarly Ashley was hesitant to seek entry, believing that the “gatekeepers of poetry magazines” had “an agenda” that he did not subscribe to. He assumed, therefore, that automatic rejection would ensue. Patrick describes his initial experiences as “humiliating, demeaning, I was hurt. I felt wounded”. Nevertheless, he was determined to learn from his experiences and cross over into poetry.

Such experiences were not peculiar to those who were beginning to work in a new genre. Writers in the sample have experienced rejection and isolation even within their own primary discourse communities. For example Karla commented on closed-minded views of some fellow poets towards experimental poetry: “there is the judgement rather than the listening”. Both Colin and Aidan describe the impact of negative reviews of their poetry collections on their confidence as writers. Keris spoke of a patronizing poetry editor who seemed to say that she was “trying too hard”. She considered that rejection of an academic paper felt like less of an “attack on identity” than she might feel if a submitted poem was rejected by a journal.

The sense of being compelled to write in a particular way for academic purposes was a common thread in the interviews. This way of becoming an academic appeared to call into question writers’ previously developed views about writing and/or writing practices. Creative writers who had moved in to academic work at a later stage in their lives found this to be a constant/recurring challenge – even if they had achieved academic success through promotions or publication of their research work. Jenny (coaching) felt conflicted by a need to reconcile the “experiential notion of writing” that she found in poetry with “a demand for certainty, with a need for an expert voice, with the expectation of a firm and well-argued position” which was required in her academic writing. Denise endeavoured to fuse aspects of her writing self, to find “the space to be creative in academic writing too”. Jocelyn said she was “catapulted” into taking academic writing seriously as a result of rejection and redundancy. She had then painstakingly “learnt” academic writing with reference to external constraints, peer reviews and referees. Karla’s “worst moment” came when a supervisor told her that there was no improvement in her writing and that they did not think she “cut it academically or creatively”. Ironically, she heard the next day that the same writing

being criticized was being published. Nevertheless this was a significant moment for her: “their criticism still affects me today.”

What emerges from these accounts is the importance of audience approval for the writer at the development stages. The majority of writers do not recount a similar dependency or vulnerability with reference to the writing that is their secure “go-to” place. It could be that this latter constitutes “writing for oneself” and fulfilling for and in itself, whilst the “learnt” and painstakingly developed writing is “writing for others” and thus more dependent on their testimony.

Aidan remarked that he increasingly felt “judged against very narrow criteria, the form of which are essential to follow to gain any kind of ‘acceptance’ or credibility. I do it because I have to. But I am not in love with it”. He, like Jocelyn, described himself as being “trained to think in a certain way when I do it. I have to unlearn it all when I sit down to write a poem...”. Keris and Aidan perhaps represent opposite ends of the academic and poetic spectrum in terms of their starting points. Yet they both exemplify the non-translatability across the genres, describing the way in which one genre has to be learned and the other unlearned in order to succeed in both spheres.

Support for Writing

When asked about influences and key writing events most writers spoke of specific encouragements they had received to develop their work. In spite of the writing hardships and pressures of the “outer editors” they encountered (including the perceived harshness of critical peer review comments) encouragement in academic terms had occurred for five respondents through “validation”, “international recognition” and “endorsement” of their writing either from their peers or more established academics in the specific subject field that they were aspiring to belong to. Their comments convey a strong impression that these supportive acts served to legitimize their academic work, to give it stature and, consequently, to stamp the writers' passports for entry into a new community of practice. In some respects the writers' comments exemplify the need for authorization identified by Potegieter and Smit (2009).

If we return to consider the four elements of Wenger's (2009) “Communities of practice” we can see how these overlay our findings:

1. What is the “network of connections” for academic/poet writers? The writers have described the ways in which the support of the community developed their practice and anatomized where this support came from mentors and colleagues, models of good practice and the reviewers and editors who determine this, co-writers dealing with the same dual domains within and outside their subject disciplines, and disciplinary specialists and colleagues who define and push the boundaries of subject knowledge.
2. What is the shared domain of interest? The shared domain for these poet-academics includes the academic writing endeavour generally, their subject discipline specifically, and the imperative to find expression additionally through poetry and for a poetry audience.
3. How is this commitment demonstrated? The commitment demonstrated by the writers themselves has been consistent and with painstaking effort, often over years, towards the desired outcome of audience and publication. All the participants in this research have put serious time, reflection and effort into their development as writers, and identify themselves as doing so.
4. How is the shared competence demonstrated? Competence is measured by the writers themselves, as successfully reaching their chosen audience, whether academic, disciplinary, professional, or poetic. Reaching an audience, and being received by them, suggests the expectations of the community have been met, often through painstaking teasing out and internalizing of what these expectations actually are.

In discussing encouragement for poetry writing, publication (in small press magazines or pamphlets) and success in poetry competitions were mentioned by two writers as being significant confidence-boosting events. However, it was noticeable that the majority of comments on this genre focused on the value of feedback and support received from individuals (including teachers, university tutors, friends, poets, members of workshops or writing groups) and through formative reading experiences such as introduction to the work of poets they admired. Many of the poet-academics responded at length. The support they received through participation in a community of practice and their sense of the significance of this shared experience was much more strongly conveyed by these writers than those who were primarily academic-poets.

Writing Pleasures

The pleasures of writing inevitably included some comments on publication successes and receiving good reviews as well as the miraculous sale of eight copies of a poetry book after a reading and the “ovation” experienced by one author. One person commented on his sense of achievement in attaining his PhD but, interestingly, institutional markers of academic success (such as a paper being cited many times or publication in a highly rated peer-reviewed journal) were not equated with pleasure by anyone interviewed. Another writer discovered the pleasure of writing after retirement from an academic post. He felt “free – I could write about any subject”. For poet-academic Denise, enjoyment came from working in collaboration with another artist in two different media. This development marked a key entry point for her into a writing community. For many in the sample, writing poetry was not about material reward or recognition but simply about the act of writing itself – “the excitement of writing, what got you into it in the first place” as Colin describes it. Aidan commented that “happiness is not the right word, but when I am in the middle of it, it's the best feeling there is”. Similarly Gareth relished the “complete anarchic chaos” of poetry writing: “I just loved it”.

Implications and conclusions

Our findings have explored authors' contrasting perceptions of writing identity, reception and writing experiences. They offer insights for researchers, writers and institutions and raise questions which merit further investigation.

Research implications

Our study points to the importance of writer testimony in understanding both personal and institutional processes, the developmental journeys that these writers have experienced and challenges that writers engage in through their poetic and academic work. It would be interesting to ask further questions such as how confidence and identification actually manifest themselves in writing – for example in choices of form, mode, cadence, image and word – and how far these choices come about through dialogue and peer review. We might also like to ask: how precisely does poetry writing enhance academic writing and how does academic writing enhance or inhibit poetry writing? In addition, in future work it would be interesting to consider how poetry can be used as a way of reporting on research in this field which is usually presented in conventional academic prose. What effect does the use of poetry have on message and meaning? How might it change these?

Writing implications

Given the sense of separation or split personality between poetic and academic writing and the challenge of acceptance that some writers in our sample have experienced, we might glean from the data explicit strategies for “commuting” between the two domains: for example, different ways of revealing or occluding the self; reading the draft text aloud for impact and clarity; editing closely for language choice, sound and emotional impact.

Institutional implications

Our data shows how writers employed in academic contexts do not necessarily fit comfortably or solely into distinct disciplinary categories. This leads us to question whether institutions or even academic journals support and engage researchers in debates about their writing, or simply reinforce established norms. In addition we ask whether institutions should be more proactive in developing cross-disciplinary dialogues and opportunities to make writing conventions explicit, rather than leaving new writers to learn to “play the game” alone. The experiences of poets, particularly those who have come late to academic writing, leads us to question institutional peer reviewing practices and the ways in which a writer's work that sits outside of REF requirements is undervalued.

In these different “ways of being a writer”, albeit for different ends and audiences, the creative act of writing is a skilled and painstakingly developed discipline. There is scope for writers to learn from others writing successfully in other forms and for other purposes. Valuing all forms of successful writing equally, and appreciating the discipline and craft involved in each, would open the boundaries for writers to learn from one another, and develop a heightened sensitivity to different forms of expression, and different ways of constructing oneself within them.

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[i] This comment refers to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) that determines research funding allocations in the UK. An award of 3 star would indicate that the paper is deemed by an external expert panel to be of a “quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence of international quality”. Available from: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/assessmentcriteriaandleveldefinitions/> [Accessed 15 April 2016].

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