



**Voice Matters: Narratives and Perspectives on Voice
in Academic Writing**

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This is for Rory and Conor.

I hope this helps you to see

what you can do.

Bird by bird buddies!

Abstract

Voice Matters: Narratives and Perspectives on Voice in Academic Writing

The thesis contributes to an enhanced understanding of voice in academic writing. It provides an examination of different concepts of voice through a detailed review of existing literature and offers new interpretations of these concepts as well as new ideas about what voice means to people studying and working in higher education. The aims of the research were to explore stories and concepts of voice across different stages of the academic trajectory. The study involved interviews with eleven participants including undergraduate students, graduate students as well as academic and research staff within a college of business in a leading Irish research-intensive university.

I adopted a narrative approach enabling an in-depth study of the participants' experiences and perspectives in relation to their academic writing. Narrative captures the stories and fosters detailed descriptions where the researcher is encouraged to follow the participants *down their trails* (Riessman, 2008). In this study, these trails comprised stories about writing assignments, writing theses and writing for publication. They uncovered individual struggles with self-expression, frustrations with the writing process and difficulties understanding academic conventions. Alongside the stories, adopting a narrative approach also enabled in-depth conversations about voice meanings. Voice is a *slippery* (Hyland, 2012) and multi-layered concept. By teasing out its meanings in the interviews, the participants not only offered lived perspectives on voice but they also added new voice definitions, for example, *voice as nurturer of other voices*, which were not evident in the existing literature.

The title of this research has a deliberate play on words merging both aim and conclusion. The thesis explores *matters of voice* in academic writing as its research objective and through the interviews it examines how voice has applicability for participants in their writing. The thesis concludes that *voice matters*. It argues that voice is a useful and insightful concept and that exploring its place in academic writing can benefit the academic practices of students and academics in higher education. It further concludes that by considering voice we can avail of a valuable opportunity to assess our educational practices and to question some of the pervading assumptions relating to academic writing in higher education institutions today.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Voice Matters

A few events took place as I was working on this dissertation that served as a reminder of the relevance of voice in our increasingly complex and changing society. While I was writing the literature chapter, a gunman entered a cafe in Denmark¹ and shot people because they were discussing freedom of speech. This came weeks after the shooting of eleven people working for *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in Paris². These attacks raised questions about our tolerance of difference in society and the right for individuals (and groups) to voice their opinions. These attacks were directed at freedom of speech and were essentially an attempt to silence voices. The voices in question were both physical presences - the speakers in the cafe - as well as written presences - the writers and artists who worked in a controversial magazine commenting on society. While this dissertation specifically focuses on voice in academic writing, my objective here is to draw attention to voice in its broadest sense, as an issue of contemporary social, cultural and historical significance that exists beyond the academy and as one which merits more of our attention and consideration.

Some of the questions raised in this dissertation have relevance to wider society. Voice, a complex topic in itself, casts light upon the complexities and challenges of living in today's world. Voice matters because we have to navigate our understanding through a multitude of voices, opinions and perspectives on a daily basis. Voice matters because we need to be able to listen to other voices but also, within the melee, to find our own convictions. Voice matters because we need to be able to understand how and where our own voices are informed and often overshadowed by others. Voice matters because we need to consider context and motivations and perhaps to ask more frequently (as Bakhtin might), who is the speaker? In an era of rapid developments in digital communication our access to

¹ The shooting in Copenhagen took place on 14th February 2015

² The shooting in Paris took place on 15th January 2015

information and to the voices of others is greater and more immediate than ever. Nowadays we have the ability to communicate more widely and routinely through Twitter, blogs, Facebook and to send emails and texts. Writing and having a voice have become a part of our world and technology gives us a platform to voice our views and feelings in the moment. Voice matters because thinking about it can help us be more discerning about what we write and how we communicate.

Voice matters because it lies at the nexus of social and educational debate and, over the past forty years, reflects some of the shifting paradigms and priorities in education and society. Voice matters because it tells an insightful story. Part of this story is about the individual and individual expression. Part of this story is about the context - educational, cultural and societal - and part of the story is about the relationship between the individual and the context. Voice raises key issues that need to be discussed more openly and more prominently.

This thesis focusses on voice within the context of higher education and specifically in relation to academic writing. It touches upon the stories of individuals and the relationships between the individuals with their immediate institutional environment as well as the wider context of higher education and society which also have a bearing on what and how they write. The stories and discussions are about the process of writing and they are also about the joys and woes related to this process. What emerges in this research is that academic writing is an emotive subject. The interview discussions charted individual writing journeys reminiscent at times, of fairy tales or ancient tales of a hero's journey capturing moments of challenge, misadventure, rites of passage and victories alike.

By asking people about their writing and about voice – questions never previously considered by most of the research participants – this research offers useful insights. During the interviews, it provided an opportunity for those involved to reflect upon their own writing practice as well as the assumptions they had about academic writing and the expectations of the academy. In some cases, this had an immediate and tangible impact on the participants and they commented that the interview had been beneficial to them. The stories and discussions presented in this thesis have, in turn, a value for the reader. Encountering others' experiences and perspectives,

readers have an opportunity to consider their own ideas and assumptions about academic writing. Equally, by considering the questions raised in this research, readers have the opportunity to reflect upon practices in their own academic environment.

This research also contributes to the understanding of voice and in so doing, offers the opportunity to consider its applicability in higher education. The research presents a review of existing literature on voice (spanning the last forty years) and a detailed discussion of voice meanings. It also adds to the literature by including new meanings which emanated from the research participants' interpretations of voice during the interviews. By teasing out the multiple and complex meanings of voice, this research offers a means to look at the applicability of voice in higher education. This thesis contends that by considering voice through its various meanings and through the experiences of the participants in this research, there are opportunities to learn, raise more questions and potentially to address immediate issues that academic writers –students and academics alike – have with writing. This is why voice matters and why this research has value.

1.2 Research Focus and Research Questions

The study's primary aim is to explore the experiences and perspectives of voice in academic writing at different stages of the academic path. The research questions are set along two pathways which I have called *Exploring Stories* and *Exploring Concepts*. These pathways form the structure of this project. The research questions, interviews, analysis and presentation of findings adhere to this structure.

Exploring the stories relates to the participants' lived experiences of voice in academic writing. Exploring concepts looks at the different interpretations and meanings of voice among the interview participants. The research questions aligned to each pathway are shown below. These questions underpinned the research design and the development of the interview questions (see Appendix 1 for list of indicative questions).

Exploring Stories:

1. What are the experiences of the participants in relation to academic writing?
2. What are the experiences of the participants in relation to their voice through their academic writing?

Exploring Concepts:

3. What is voice in academic writing?
4. What contextual influences (from within the university and beyond) are present in the research and appear to have a bearing on academic writing and perspectives on voice?

1.3 Methodology and Methods

Clandinin and Connolly (2000) maintain that narrative inquiry provides the means to understand and make meaning of experience. Gibbs (2007) observes that narratives give respondents a voice. I used a narrative approach in this research because I saw a neat alignment between the narrative methodology - giving voice - and my research objectives to understand voice better. I also used a narrative approach because it enabled a close up view of the meanings of voice through the participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

Narrative is a qualitative method which is human-centred and it is about the story. It creates a space for considering people's stories and through these stories it captures the complexity and richness of human experiences. Riessman (2008) observes that narratives "invite us as listeners, readers, and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator" (p.9). Through narrative then, we can get a closer view of the narrator's reality. We can come closer to understanding how they feel and think as we walk momentarily in their shoes.

Clandinin and Connolly (2000) talk about narrative inquiry as a three-dimensional space where we are “telling stories from our past that frame our present standpoints moving back and forth from the personal to the social, and situating it all in place” (p.70). Temporality is a key feature of narrative research. Storytelling provides the opportunity to make meaning of past experiences, relate them to present circumstances or opinions and to consider influences on those opinions or feelings. Narrative research can therefore be a rewarding experience for the participants. Having the space to tell their stories helps their meaning-making. The act of storytelling helps research participants as narrators to consider events and connect moments in a way they have not done previously.

The Clandinin and Connolly quotation above also introduces context as one part of narrative’s three-dimensional space. While initially narrative research seems to focus on the individual and the individual’s meaning-making through story, it is also a powerful way of exploring the wider context, moving from the *personal* to the *social*. Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) see narratives as “an exploration of the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individual’s experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (p.42). Through the *small stories*, (what might be events or activities not necessarily considered consequential by the storyteller), narrative offers an avenue to view the contextual narratives or *big stories* (see Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008 and Andrews *et al.*, 2013). Thus, the context can be viewed through the eyes and experience of an individual and can be made more understandable or more relatable this way. In this research project, there is a continuous interplay between the narrative and context. In the findings chapters, the stories and perspectives of the interview participants are discussed in relation to their immediate (institutional) context as well as in relation to the wider context of higher education.

1.4 Scope

As with any research project, this study should be understood in terms of scope, that is, in terms of what it seeks to achieve and what it cannot achieve within the bounds of the research. There were a number of considerations and decisions that influenced

the size and scope of this research project. The first defining research decision was my choice to look at the different experiences and interpretations of voice at different stages across the academic trajectory. This informed my decision to work within the context of one college rather than across disciplines in the university so that the focus would be on voice and the experiences and would not be a discussion on interdisciplinary differences. Secondly, the selection of research methodology influenced the number of participants in this study. Selecting a narrative approach is a decision to take an in-depth view at experiences and perspectives. It is a choice to focus on depth over breadth giving time to participant stories and meaning-making as opposed to looking for responses to a pre-defined set of questions. Finally, the scope of this project is influenced by its very nature as a time-bound doctoral study and it is important to acknowledge that this imposes limitations. For example, the research data gathered in this thesis is the result of one meeting with each participant. I do not track the participants' perceptions over time, which might change from those presented here. This perhaps signals that there is potential for a longitudinal research project which could follow academic writers' perspectives over time tracking their academic development and perhaps returning to their stories for further discussion and perspective. My research has a distinct value nonetheless. It acts as a kind of snapshot, a moment in time capturing peoples' thoughts and perspectives and offers a close-up view of writing life in an academic institution.

1.5 Researcher Interest in Topic

My choice of academic writing and voice as topic for this dissertation can be traced back to my own academic history. I returned to study mid-life and sought to move my career from industry to higher education. I saw an MA in Higher Education as a route to achieving this and, like many people returning to education, worried whether I would meet the academic demands of it. When I decided to progress to doctoral studies, I did so tentatively. What came as a genuine surprise was the pleasure I derived from learning and writing and how, through my studies, I came to know myself better and to discover strengths that I had not realised existed.

My interest in academic writing and voice formed incrementally as I undertook several assignments during the EdD which related to academic writing and critical

theory. I developed a keen interest in academic writing and, somewhere along the way, also developed a professional interest in being involved in helping students to overcome their difficulties with academic writing. While my new career in higher education has thus far remained largely undefined given the variety of contract roles that I have undertaken, my doctoral studies and interest in academic writing have forged a steadier career pathway which is gradually, but unquestionably, unfolding. I have had the opportunity, since starting the EdD, to provide support and teach academic writing at undergraduate and master's levels. I have introduced voice as a discussion topic with students and lecturing colleagues and my first steps in developing lessons have been encouraging. While the main concern of this thesis has been exploring voice, a minor concern, or perhaps reward, has been finding my own.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises seven chapters. Chapter two presents perspectives on academic writing and voice in the literature. It introduces different theoretical approaches to academic writing demonstrating that even before engaging in complex discussions on voice, academic writing occupies a loaded and intricate terrain in its own right. The chapter then takes a journey across time, theories and metaphors to capture the complexity of voice and to offer readers a coherent guide to the multiple and multi-layered meanings of voice. Chapter three discusses the methodology. It provides an overview of the key features of narrative and discusses how narrative fits with the objectives of this research project. Chapter four continues to discuss methodology and focusses the discussion on the project's research design. Quoting Riessman (2008), the chapter is entitled "Storying the Stories Collected" because it describes the processes and research decisions that guide the collection of narratives as well as their analysis.

Chapter five is the first of two findings chapters. This chapter links to the first research objective about exploring story. It contributes to the understanding of voice in relation to academic writing by presenting lived experiences of individuals at different stages along the academic trajectory. The chapter presents a selection of

sixteen narratives and provides a commentary with my interpretation of the narratives and their significance. The narratives are organised by four theme headings within the chapter. These themes emerged inductively as part of the research analysis:

- Personal Voice and Identity: The Presence of the Writer in Academic Writing;
- Competing Voices, Supportive Voices;
- Tentative Voices, Confident Voices;
- Voice Silencers: Personal and Institutional Constraints on Academic Writing.

Chapter six is the second findings chapter which presents data relating to the second research objective (exploring the concept of voice). This chapter sets out a range of perspectives on what voice is and how it relates to academic writing. It contributes to the understanding of the meaning and applicability of voice in academic writing by introducing different nuances to existing voice meanings and by also adding new definitions for voice that do not feature elsewhere in the literature.

Chapter seven is entitled “Why Voice Matters”. It returns to the title of this dissertation and answers why, because of the study, I feel that voice is important and why it deserves more time and attention in higher education. This chapter is about voice’s contribution and about the contribution of this thesis.

Chapter 2

Perspectives on Voice in the Literature

2.1 Introduction to Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an enhanced understanding of voice by drawing upon existing literature and to situate my research within existing work on academic writing and voice. The chapter reviews of a complex and often contradictory body of literature to survey the multiple connotations of voice and to raise some of the issues and questions that arise as lived experience in the research chapters. It begins with an exploration of academic writing in contemporary higher education and then proceeds with a critical examination of literature relating to voice. This draws together different theoretical perspectives and conceptualisations of voice as an individually-centred concept, a socio-cultural concept and as a metaphor for agency and identity. The challenge of this chapter has been to engage with all perspectives and to bring them together cohesively. This chapter shows that there is no easy or concise answer to the question ‘what is voice?’ It equally shows however that voice, while it can be complicated, is also revelatory.

In this chapter, I adopt a funnelled approach giving both a broad and focussed understanding of what voice means. First, the chapter provides an overview of academic writing. It introduces different theoretical approaches for understanding academic writing and examines a range of purposes for academic writing in the contemporary higher education environment. The chapter then charts the development of different concepts of voice chronologically and sketches how the debate and the meanings of voice have evolved alongside wider developments in educational and social theory over the past forty years.

Following this, the chapter hones in on different metaphors associated with voice. Pinker (2007) sees the metaphor as a key way to explain thought and language. By focussing on the metaphors associated with voice, the chapter provides the opportunity to pause and consider the meanings and the language of voice in depth. The meanings that emerged in the research are varied and sometimes polemical and

they relate to individual perspectives as well as wider, social, educational and ideological perspectives. Through metaphor, we can take a close-up view of voice and access new layers of “human understanding” and “new realities in our lives” (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, p.196). Voice, because of its complexity is a useful pathway to understanding our realities and questioning our assumptions.

Finally, the chapter introduces three theoretical frameworks. These constructs help to understand voice in greater detail and aid a more practical application of voice within academic writing. The frameworks essentially dissect voice. They show several ways that voice can be construed within the actual body of an academic text and equally show how voice can be understood in relation to the writer, the writer’s identity and his/her world.

2.2 About Academic Writing

2.2.1 Introduction to Academic Writing

Richardson (2005) writes: “Styles of writing are neither fixed nor neutral but rather reflect the historically shifting domination of particular schools or paradigms” (p.960). The focus of this thesis is on voice in academic writing and part of this analysis inevitably involves a discussion on academic writing and its context. Richardson’s quote hits the right note here because discussions about voice and writing in this thesis demonstrate the need for writing to be understood as more than a written artefact or disembodied text. Academic writing will be shown to be temporal, socially-situated and infused with writer identity. It will also be shown to be dialogic and unresolved - ultimately open to multiple interpretations by its readers.

The first step to exploring academic writing is to look to its origins and to briefly explore some of the conventions that govern and shape expectations in the academy. This section provides a basis for understanding why tensions and divergent beliefs about academic writing exist today and provides a useful backdrop for exploring the purposes and rationales for academic writing which I discuss subsequently. It is

worthwhile pointing out (before discussing the different views) that there is also some consensus in the literature about academic writing. There is agreement, for example, that academic writing is hard work which employs a vast amount of skills, time and a degree of conformity. It takes physical, psychological and emotional effort and involves steady effort encompassing thinking, drafting, crafting, editing and proofing among its tasks. Thomson and Kamler (2013) talk about writing as both *thinking* and *feeling* work. Woods (1999) argues that pain is an indispensable accompaniment of the process of writing. There is pain involved in the shaping and crafting but he also notes that this pain may involve elements of personal dimensions of discomfort too since the writer has to encounter his/her own memories, limitations and bias through the process of writing and research. He writes: “it may be helpful to conceive of the problem not so much in terms of what you do the data, but what you do to yourself.” (p.11) Woods’ quote introduces the idea that the writing has a writer and the writing, as well as being about the production of a text, is revealing of significantly more. It is about a process of learning and crafting and it is also an act of identity where the writer has internal work to do. Woods’ quote here is setting the scene and introducing some of the uncertainties and complexities of writing, representation, voice and identity that continue to be explored throughout this thesis.

Finally, it also worthwhile adding a note about the genres of academic writing to be discussed in this thesis. While acknowledging that in the current context there are many different and emerging multi-modal genres of academic writing outside these traditional modes, I have limited the focus of academic writing here to specific genres namely, essays, thesis writing and writing for academic journals which continue to be the principal modes of academic practice for the participants in this study and the main markers of their academic achievement.

2.2.2 Academic Writing: Origins and Tensions

Academic writing originates in scientific writing and the views founded in the Enlightenment which separated the worlds of literary writing - associated with fiction, flourish and aesthetics - and scientific writing which was concerned with facts and objectivity employing a deliberately precise and detached language (Richardson, 2005). The views about scientific writing and the understanding of the

role of scientist/researcher as detached, objective purveyor of ‘facts’ prevailed until the twentieth century which saw changes in how people viewed truth and the nature and possibility of scientific objectivity. In the wake of postmodernism, views on the role of the social sciences and the role of researcher changed dramatically. Richardson (2005) describes the shift as: “a time when a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side by side” (p.961). No theoretical method or discourse is privileged above another because, from a postmodernist perspective, all truth claims, methods and theories are doubted equally. What this meant for qualitative research was a shift towards reporting experiences and perspectives rather than stating facts. Richardson (2005) states it well:

Qualitative writers are off the hook, so to speak. They do not have to play God, writing as disembodied omniscient narrators claiming universal and atemporal general knowledge. They can eschew the questionable metanarrative of scientific objectivity and still have plenty to say as situated speakers, subjectivities engaged in knowing/telling about the world as they perceive it. (p. 961)

What can be said of academic writing today, is that there exist divergent views on what is appropriate. In some parts of the academy for example the social sciences, academic writing evolved in format, purpose and style. It became more reflexive and there was a surge of interest in new approaches to inquiry (narrative research being one). In other corners of the academy, more traditional approaches to research and writing were maintained and continue to shape the expectations relating to writing in these disciplines.

Whatever the disciplinary leaning, it is true to say that assumptions about conventions and practices are often adopted systematically and not necessarily challenged and they have also become embedded as cultural norms. Coffin et al. (2003) maintain that while academic writing is central to learning and teaching in higher education, it often remains “an invisible dimension of the curriculum” (p.3) that is not overtly discussed or explored. Students and academics learn the cultural norms of their discipline and adapt to them often without these expectations being clearly articulated.

The next section looks at some of the different frameworks for understanding academic writing and unpacks some of these (often competing) perspectives. The discussion on different approaches to writing demonstrates that even before we hit the muddy waters of voice, academic writing has some tensions and competing interpretations of its own.

2.2.3 Three Theoretical Approaches for Understanding Academic Writing

Coffin et al. (2003) and Hyland (2009) discuss three theoretical approaches for understanding academic writing. These are: writing as *text*, writing as *process* and writing as *social practice*. The view of academic writing as *text* focuses on writing as a textual artefact which is tangible and measurable. Writing is a product or output. This view of writing was predominant in the academy for years and continues today in many disciplines. As will be discussed below, it includes conceptualisations of academic writing as text for assessment and as text for publication.

The *process* approach to writing foregrounds the experience of writing over the outcome. It places an emphasis on individual thoughts and ideas emerging creatively and organically. The understanding of writing as a process has itself diverse perspectives. The expressivist view highlights the act of writing as a vehicle for personal expression and creativity. The cognitivist view highlights the importance of writing as a problem-solving and incremental learning activity. The notion of writing as inquiry discusses writing as a process of idea development and understanding which evolves through different stages of the research.

The *social* view of writing positions it as a situated and social practice. This is a distinct move from writing as text where writing is seen as a solo undertaking that is detached from its surroundings. The act of writing is *situated* because the process of writing involves a writer who has a life beyond the page. The writer's ideas and assumptions, which he/she brings to the writing have been influenced by their prior experience and by the context in which they live and work. It is also considered a *social practice* because the writer writes within the context of its immediate surroundings and as part of a community. Hyland (2009) defines contexts as "sites for interactions where relationships, and the rules which order them, can both

facilitate and constrain composing” (p.28). For academic writing, the community of scholars and the institutional or disciplinary conventions and expectations have an influence on the writing and the writer. Thomson and Kamler see academic writing for journals as a conversation between scholars and argue that academics need to position themselves as part of a wider scholarly community. The community has particular expectations and its own language so part of writing, involves conforming to the conventions and language practices of this community.

Beyond the writer and the influences that inform the writer’s writing choices, writing must also be seen as a social and dialogical act whereby the text is read and interpreted by the reader. This notion moves on the view of writing as situated and social by incorporating the relationship the reader has with the final text. Hyland (2009) writes that writing is: “a joint endeavour between writers and readers, co-constructed through the active understanding of rhetorical situations and the likely responses of readers” (p.31). This view of writing leaves it as unresolved. The meaning-making is contingent upon the different relationships that emerge between writer and reader.

I have introduced here some of the different ways to understand academic writing and I have introduced some concepts such as self-representation and discursive influences on text which will be explored in more detail through later discussions on voice in this chapter. Woods (1999) writes that academic writers have different purposes. The next section looks at these purposes and explores some of the different approaches to and rationales for academic writing.

2.2.4 A Discussion on the Different Purposes of Academic Writing in Contemporary Higher Education

Writing as part of Assessment and Learning in University

Academic writing is central to the learning and assessment practices of higher education (Coffin et al., 2003 & Lillis, 2001). Through writing, students demonstrate knowledge of their discipline and simultaneously demonstrate their ability to construct an argument and present their ideas and opinions. Often academic writing

is seen in more output or product related terms because of its role in assessment practices and the ultimate grading and qualifications that are viewed as indicators of students' success at university.

Alongside this more instrumental positioning of academic writing there is also a recognition that there is a need to embed deeper learning in university education and to help students to move away from adopting strategic and surface approaches. In a bid to improve student engagement with the curriculum, many universities are introducing a more layered approach to assessment practices. This involves integrating more low stakes assessments into the curriculum to encourage and allow students to develop better writing skills and to improve their disciplinary familiarity. While academic writing, in assessment terms, retains much of its emphasis on outcomes, there is nonetheless mounting recognition that more emphasis on the process has benefits for student learning.

Writing as an Indicator of Performance

The approach to writing in product or outcome terms does not exist solely in the domain of student writing and assessment. In recent years, there has been greater emphasis on the importance of academic writing as a measure of an individual academic's success and, collectively, as an indicator of a university's reputation and ranking. Academic writing forms a key part of the academic's role. Scholars disseminate their research and share knowledge through publication and, as Woods (1993) notes, publishing can be one of the most rewarding aspects of the academic's job. However, the emphasis on and motivation for publishing has shifted somewhat as part of a greater transition to a more business-like and performance-led orientation in academic institutions. This *new managerialism* (Deem, 2001) has instigated significant changes in the structure and practices of higher education institutions and academic writing has become one of the features of this culture of performativity (Ball, 2003).

What this means for academic writing and academics who are writing, is a persistent awareness and sometimes palpable pressure to get published. Thomson and Kamler (2013) write about the academics they meet in their writing workshops who are

“stressed and distressed, working within performance-driven university systems” (p.1). In this study, I include narratives from doctoral, postdoctoral and early academics who talk openly about their concerns about getting published and the prevailing expectations which increase their anxiety about writing. The culture of performativity and the resulting “schizophrenia of values and purpose” (Ball, 2003, p.223) are perhaps realised in the positioning of academic writing, the academic’s role and the emphasis placed on extrinsic validations. This is explored through the narratives chapter in this thesis and further on in this chapter through the literature on voice.

As Woods outlined above however, there are undoubtedly great intrinsic rewards in writing and getting published and contributing to knowledge and society. This return for academic writing has not gone away but the awareness of these intrinsic rewards (which I discuss next) has perhaps been lost in the rhetoric of reputation, citation and publication especially among emerging academics who are trying to develop their career and identity as a scholar.

Writing as Knowledge Production and Contribution

Coffin et al. (2003) argue that one of the key functions of academic texts is the ability to persuade readers through well-constructed argument, logical reasoning and evidence. The contribution of writing, in their view, is about moving thinking forward or even changing current thinking. Thomson and Kamler (2013) similarly see academic writing as a scholarly endeavour with a clear purpose which relates to shifting perspectives and moving people from seeing things one way to another. They discuss contribution in relation to journal articles and publication and argue that academic writing should be about contributing to knowledge and to the field. In their writing workshops with researchers, they throw down the gauntlet to their participants and ask them to consider: “So what? Who cares? Why write about this? What’s the point?” (p.51).

Contribution to knowledge supports contribution to understanding and compassion from a societal perspective. Woods (1999) talks about one aspect of contribution as offering insight into “problems and anomalies one might have experienced in the

past in a structured way aligned to general human experience” (p.15). Woods here is echoing C. Wright Mills (1959) who viewed social research as having a contribution to society and social good. Academic writing then is a means of refracting private life and private issues through a social lens to make them public, to raise the consciousness of others, to stimulate conversation and compassion about important matters that might otherwise not be discussed. This is academic writing’s contribution to research and to society. Richardson’s (2005) vision for the contribution of writing equally resonates with Mills’ sense of social purpose as she describes her purpose in writing as one which can “teach all of us about social injustice and methods for alleviating it” (p.965).

Thomson and Kamler (2013) conceptualise scholarly contribution in terms of its community. They argue that in writing, academic writers need to see themselves not merely as reporters of a piece of work but as members of a community with something of value to say. This conception of writing as an ongoing conversation is explored further on. Prior to this however, it is useful to look at writing as a process of learning and discovery.

Writing as Process and as Inquiry

This view of academic writing moves it from the perspective of textual production or output to the process of writing itself and the intrinsic benefits that exist in the act of writing. In this section, I explore two separate concepts of writing as process. The first, coming from a cognitivist and a later constructivist perspective, see the process of writing as a generator of ideas and organiser of thoughts where the act of writing helps student construct their knowledge and learning. The second view talks about the process of writing as an act of discovery and inquiry which is itself an instrument of the research process. There is a third way of looking at writing as a creative activity as advocated by the expressivists. This forms part of the discussion on voice later in the chapter.

Britton (1970) advocated a pedagogical approach called *writing for learning* where learning was facilitated by writing as the brain had to organise thoughts and then

communicate them. Rose (1985) described writing as far more than a skill of transcribing seeing it as a cognitive act. He contended:

writing seems central to the shaping and directing of certain modes of cognition, is integrally involved in learning, is a means of defining the self and defining reality, is a means of representing and contextualizing information. (p.348)

In the constructivist view of learning, writing is considered a process which involves the student's active participation in their learning. When the student is involved in writing, it demands an evaluation of information, a communication of ideas and subsequent revisions. It supports the students' understanding and application of knowledge.

Becker (1986) argues that the process of learning in writing is overlooked and that much of the advice given to writers is wrong. Student and novice academic writers, he notes, are advised to get their thoughts clear, come up with their argument and then write, a belief, he argues, that is "embodied in the folk maxim that if you think clearly then you will write clearly" (p.16). He argues that writing *is* a form of thinking. The writing process generates ideas and crystallises thinking. Writing is not an act of textual production but a process of thinking, creating arguments, refining and learning. He advocates for writing to be represented not in terms of the final polished text but more as an iterative untidy process where newer versions of the essay or article emerge gradually. The *mixed-up draft* is no cause for shame, he argues. The drafting is about discovery and not presentation.

Becker also contends that writing helps shape the research and the research design. It aids thinking through ideas and moves definitively away from the more linear notion of research and writing up afterwards. Thomson and Kamler (2014) similarly argue that research *is* writing. They take exception to the phrase 'writing up' in relation to dissertation writing because it camouflages all the work and complexity involved.

Rose (1985) argues that writing is intimately involved in the very nature of the inquiry. He claims: "writing is not just a skill with which one can present or analyze knowledge. It is essential to the very existence of certain kinds of knowledge"

(p.348). Richardson (2005) sees writing in the social sciences as method of inquiry where it presents a viable opportunity for learning and discovery about the self and the research topic. The writing, she argues, is a method of knowing. Richardson sees writing as a dynamic, changing process that encourages the researcher's reflexivity and self-awareness. This reflexive practice is about "honoring the location of the self" (p.965) and this entails situating the writing in other aspects of one's life and acknowledging the historical, biographical and contextual influences that interplay and shape the research and the writing. She sees this as an important aspect of the research, which serves to remind us that the research is grounded and contextual. It also helps to demystify the research process for readers and other researchers who can learn from it.

Throughout this process, the writer undergoes a process of self-discovery, generates ideas, crystalizes thoughts and makes connections. Richardson (2005) talks about refracting her life through a sociological lens. This process has both internal and external value. Internally, it brings about an emotional response in addition to the intellectual response. Wading more deeply into her subject through writing increases her compassion. She writes: "I know that when I move deeply into my writing, both my compassion for others and my actions on their behalf increase" (p.967). Subsequently, this enhances the writing and the value for the reader because if the writing has impact, it can raise awareness of social injustices and therefore have an external value because it is through such awareness, she argues, that perceptions can change.

Writing as Conversation and Social Practice

Academic writing is a social practice which involves a dialogue between writer and reader and it is also a socially-situated practice which means that a written text is not produced in isolation but rather as one that is inevitably influenced by its context.

Academic writing from a student learning perspective is a conversation between student and lecturer. The student writes an essay and the lecturer provides feedback summative and/or formative and the student interprets this and may or may not take comments on board. In graduate writing, this may involve revisions and further

iterations of work. There is an ongoing dialogue between writer and supervisor. The act of writing for publication also involves writing for others - a community of scholars or discourse community - and adding to a conversation about a topic in the field. The act of writing, while potentially executed in a private space, ultimately, is not as an isolated endeavour. The writing is *for* someone and its meaning will only come to life through the readers' interpretations. Thomson and Kamler (2013) summarise the nature of this dialogue:

The words only become meaningful when they are read and interpreted by readers. The act of reading is, in fact, to enter into a dialogue with the text, bringing what is on the page into conversation with our own experiences. The act of writing is an act of anticipation – it is to create a text which will stimulate a conversation with the reader. Writing is thus the beginning of a dialogue and a process of interactive meaning-making. (p.56)

Readers' interpretations will vary just as the writers' offering because both levels of meaning-making (in producing the text and interpreting it) are influenced by their immediate surroundings, expectations or disciplinary conventions and epistemologies. Added to this, is the temporal dimension and how the dialogue between writer and reader will inevitably shift over time as knowledge, understanding and cultural norms ebb and flow.

Kamler and Thomson (2008) also refer to the situatedness of academic texts. They note that writing is “embedded in a tangle of cultural, historical practices that are both institutional and disciplinary” (p.508). The disciplinary norms, the institutional and academic conventions also play a part in the act of writing and the *becoming* of the writer. Bartholomae (1986) talks about student writers and their need to learn the *code* of the academic disciplines. This he contends is one of students' greatest difficulties with academic writing. Becker (1986) talks about academic writers adopting a persona of the academic and employing “classy” writing in a bid to be deemed acceptable in the community, that is to seem scholarly enough to enter the scholarly or “elite” community.

While Becker (1986) argues for more plain speaking and informality in academic discourse, Thomson and Kamler (2013) offer a different perspective and argue that

these internal rules and conventions are important because they bind members of the discourse community together. They argue that “we can think of these shared ‘internal’ understandings and languages as allowing the community to do its work rather than a failure to speak plainly or some addiction to speaking in tongues” (p.30).

What is interesting in this divergence of views is where voice, as discussed further on in this chapter, can offer a new perspective and potentially new avenues to further interrogate different schools of thought. When considering voice as an aspect of writing, we can ask writers to consider other voices of their disciplines but to also consider how they anticipate how their voice will be interpreted by future readers. By considering voice, we also invoke writers to think about their identity.

Writing as an Act of Scholarly Identity

Ivanic (1998) argues writing is about more than dissemination of content but is a vehicle of self-representation. Tang and John (1999) highlight the growing trend away from traditional distant and impersonal notions of academic writing towards an acknowledgement of the writer’s presence in the text. Identity, as will be discussed in detail further in this chapter, is a plural, temporal and multi-layered concept that is socially and culturally defined. Hyland (2009) explains:

Identity thus refers to the various ‘selves’ writers employ in different contexts, the processes of their connection to particular communities and their responses to the power relations institutionally inscribed in them. (p.70)

Kamler and Thomson (2008) state that writing a dissertation is an event that involves both *becoming* and *belonging*. They view writing, particularly the doctoral dissertation, as a mix of text work and identity work wherein, “texts and identities are formed together in and through writing” (p.508). The process of writing produces a text but also, they add, a doctoral scholar.

The notion of *belonging* adds an additional dimension to this scholarly identity. It conjures up a community that the scholar seeks to belong to. The doctoral writing process is a rite of passage that invokes membership of a community. Hyland (2009)

defines this concept of membership in more detail as: “a writer’s ability to recognise, replicate and, within limits, innovate, a community’s organisational structures, current interests and rhetorical practices” (p.71). As will be seen later in this research (see Chapter 5), participants talked about a set of norms and practices of the academic community as *rules of play*.

Becker (1986) writes extensively about the *scholarly persona* that students and postgraduates adopt. He singles out “classy writing” as one way to gain acceptance and to appear “classy” or believable. He notes: “The persona we adopt when we writers tells readers (and by extension all the potential skeptics) who we are and why we should be believed” (p.33). Ivanic (1999) whose work is discussed in detail later in this chapter, contends that that a writer’s identity can be revealed by the discursive choices he/she makes in the text. Resonating with Becker’s idea of scholarly persona (and later work by Cherry - see further in chapter), she builds up a more comprehensive depiction of the scholarly persona which she describes as the *discoursal self*. The discoursal self is one of many aspects of self-representation that Ivanic argues, is revealed in a written text. It is the persona adopted (consciously or unconsciously) to claim membership of and acceptance within the scholarly community.

Exploring identity is integral to the writer’s awareness of his/her positionality in the writing process. Creating this level of awareness of identity improves the writing as the writer is more deliberate in his/her choices and more likely to make more well-informed writing decisions. Exploring identity is equally important to academic reading because it provides the clues and cues on how to read and critically interpret the text. The reader looks beyond the content to the writer and his/her influences that have helped shape the text. The reader begins to contemplate the writer’s voice in the text and the other voices that permeate it.

2.2.5 Why Writing Matters

Considering its role in teaching and learning, it is not difficult to see the importance of academic writing. Beyond this however, when we peel back the layers and think of academic writing and its role in developing ideas, developing knowing, developing compassion and developing writer identity, we can appreciate a far greater significance. Anne Lamott (1994) talks about writing as an opportunity to expose the unexposed. Some of what we expose in academic writing is about the research topic so that we contribute to knowledge in the field but some of what we expose is ourselves. There are potentially unexplored aspects that come to light through writing and part of the research process involves this adopting a reflexive approach.

Inadvertently, I echoed Richardson (2005) when I chose the title of this thesis as “Voice Matters” because Richardson writes that *writing matters*. She maintains:

The question is not whether we will write the lives of people — as social scientists that is what we do — but how and for whom. We choose how we write, and the choices we make do make a difference to ourselves, to social science, and to the people we write about. (p.1)

Richardson makes the point here that we need to consider the research process, the writing choices we make, our own self-discovery during the process and finally the reader who is involved in the text’s interpretation. We need to think about academic writing in terms of the changes and contribution it makes.

My own take on this is that writing should be conceptualised as an act of giving - whether it is contributing to knowledge or sharing personal experiences that invite readers to consider alternative perspectives. Writing for me is an act of giving and sometimes this gets lost in the rhetoric of getting – that is, getting grades, or getting published, getting citations or views, or followers, or getting promoted. Exploring writing from this perspective offers fresh insights and invites us to question the different approaches and rationales for writing in the academy. The next section explores voice in academic writing. Many of the points raised here are explored more vividly and thoroughly through voice in writing.

2.3 Charting Voice in Writing

The topic of voice in academic writing is *slippery* (Hyland, 2012) and contentious. Debates on voice have generally centred on two areas: what voice means and secondly, its relevance in academic writing. The understanding of what voice means has evolved over the past forty years and has become enmeshed in discussions on positionality, the questioning of objectivity and debates about the role of identity in academic writing. Views on the relevance of voice in academic writing have, at times, been polemical in the academic community and it is these tensions that reveal that voice has a lot to say about higher education today. In trying to answer whether voice is relevant to academic writing, Matsuda and Tardy (2007) answered that it “depends on how voice is defined and how its relevance is measured and interpreted” (p.236). The next section briefly charts a chronological journey of voice to set the scene and to further our understanding of voice and its relevance.

The modern roots of voice emanate from composition studies in the USA in the late 1960s and 1970s as part of an expressivist writing movement which sought to encourage students to connect with their inner thoughts and feelings. It promoted the channelling of a distinctive self into writing and furthermore encouraged student writers to explore and embrace their inner selves through their writing. Stewart (1972) viewed voice in terms of authenticity as a consequence of undertaking a process of self-discovery. He related authenticity to the idea of authorial voice, which for him meant having a sincere and distinctive voice on the page. Macrorie (1985) was passionate in his belief that all students could write if the conditions were conducive to it. He called on teachers to help *truth-telling* in the classroom, to let their students dispel their “English-teacher inspired fears” (p.283) and to find their authentic voices. Proponents such as Peter Elbow advocated the freeing of writers from the confines (such as academic writing conventions) that limit imagination and creativity through *freewriting*. Elbow (1995) also talked about the conflict he saw between the role of the writer and the role of academic. While teaching students, he admitted to placing more emphasis on developing their *writer traits* over their *academic traits* whereby he invited them:

to take their own ideas too seriously; to think that they are the first person to think of their idea and be all wrapped up and possessive about it—even though others might have already written better about it—I invite them to write as though they are a central speaker at the center of the universe. (p.80)

Elbow's contention was that by allowing student writers this agency in their writing, they could take ownership and steer their own development rather than adopting a more passive role. He believed that student writers, who had not developed as writers, handed up their writing to the lecturer asking "is this okay?" Conversely, he argued, the student that had developed his/her writer identity was more likely to be saying: "Listen to me, I have something to tell you" (p.81).

Bowden (1995) provides an interesting context for understanding the expressivist movement. She sees it as a counter-cultural movement which was reacting to wider social and educational systems of that era in the USA and a growing dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War. At that time, the American government had implemented measures to create more rigorous school system with an emphasis on New Criticism whereby students would develop a more literary and technical vocabulary to achieve, what they considered was, an *academic approach*. The expressivist movement sought to move away from the more instrumental outputs prescribed for English studies and to intervene with a more personal story and a curriculum that was more aligned to the development of the individual. They moved away from the notion of literary texts as autonomous objects (to be systematically analysed) and imbued writing with a deeply personal and subjective voice. These shifts had implications in the classrooms too. Class sizes were reduced and opportunities for collaborative group work were facilitated so that students could more openly voice their opinions in the classroom.

The *voice enthusiasts* (Elbow, 2007) of the era related voice to the emergence of powerful writing and empowerment through writing. The contrary view, as articulated by the *voice sceptics*, criticised the notion of a personal voice in writing and argued that it was a mistaken concept since voice could only be understood as a product of our context and culture. Arguing from a social constructivist perspective, Bartholomae (1995) criticised the expressivist prioritisation of the inner self over

attention to the outer world and the development of students' understanding of academic discourse. He argued that student writers write in a space which is already defined by all preceding writing and that they should be helped to understand this "busy, noisy, intertextual space" (p.64) and that it would be better for student writers "to think about, or better yet, confront their situatedness" (p.64). Gaining an understanding of the surrounding voices - the disciplinary and institutional discourses - should, he contended, be prioritised over excessive attention to the development of the individual voice.

Following a period of high profile arguments, the topic of voice quietened for some years. It re-emerged in the 1990s and again became a contested topic, this time in the field of second language learning where questions were raised about the influence and implications of students' first language expression on their second language learning (in this case, English). In 2001, an entire volume of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* was dedicated to voice and once more the meaning of voice and its relevance in academic writing were debated. The next generation of voice enthusiasts saw voice in terms of identity and self-representation that was socially, historically and culturally mediated. They took a poststructuralist and postmodern view of voice and moved away from the idea of language as part of a system or master plan (Saussure's *Langue* and *Parole*) to greater emphasis on the communication that takes place between people in a given time and place. In the journal, Prior (2001) picked up where Elbow and Bartholomae's debate left off. Drawing on the work of Bakhtin in particular, Prior argued that voice should be understood as *both* personal and social because discourse is both historically and socially situated. He argued:

whenever an individual produces external utterance, it is personalized, not in the sense of coming from some transcendent self walled off from the world, but in the sense of bearing indexical traces of that person's sense-making in a specific, interested, historical trajectory through concrete social encounters. (p. 71)

This view of voice moves on in complexity. Voice is not about an individual voice that is one-dimensional. Voice moves into the realm of identity and the social

determination of identity which transports it to a multi-dimensional space where it is influenced by history, context and social relations.

In the same journal, Ivanic and Camps (2001) discussed voice in terms of identity and self-representation and discussed “the idea of conveying an impression of self through semiotic resources” (p.4). In the same way that a regional accent or word choice might indicate a social group or origin in speech, they argued that that writing choices (syntax or lexicon, for example) construct identity too. From this perspective, there is no such thing as impersonal writing. Voice is viewed as a cultural and social representation of the writer and the writing itself is a site of the “negotiation of identity” (p.4). From this perspective, voice is a key aspect of the reading of academic texts. They argued that it should become part of the teaching of writing in second language pedagogy so that student writers develop awareness not only of voices in the texts that they are reading but also so they become aware of their own voice and identity too.

Within the same edition, Hirvela and Belcher (2001) also explored voice in relation to student identity and honed in on the usefulness of voice in helping students discuss identity and self-representation. They observed:

Instead of conceptualizing voice as an end to be acquired or achieved by students, we can reconstruct it as a means of creating meaningful opportunities for classroom discussions of voice, identity, self-representation... (p.88)

Hirvela and Belcher argue that the emphasis on teaching voice has obscured its value as an interpretive device whereby it could initiate useful conversations with students in relation to their identity in their writing. This finding is reaffirmed by my own findings presented in later chapters of the thesis. During my research, I discovered that the value of voice is to be found in the discussions about its place in a person’s writing. The voice conversations that took place as part of the interviews helped the participants reconceptualise their academic writing and to reflect upon - sometimes for the first time - their voice in their writing.

Alongside the enthusiasm for the different manifestations and potential for voice in the classroom, there was also a contrary view which held that voice had no relevance to academic writing at all. Stapleton (2002) argued that the focus on voice detracted from the content of the academic writing and that students would become “more concerned with identity than ideas” (p.187). Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) viewed the voice metaphor as a constituent of a self-indulgent expressivist writing pedagogy which, they argued, was not applicable to students from other cultures where an ideology of individualism was not mainstream. They questioned mainly the relevance of the personal in academic writing and recoiled from the infiltration of some of the *evangelical zeal* (Hashimoto, 1987) that sometimes accompanied the expressivist ideas.

What is clear about the second language debates is that the argument was complicated by different understandings of voice. Matsuda and Tardy (2008) criticised the voice dissenters on the basis that their argument was tied to the ideology of individualism and that there was “a tendency to conflate the notion of voice with individual voice” (p.101). There is validity in this argument. Many voice enthusiasts had begun, at this stage, to embrace a more external and contextually embedded meaning of voice that existed beyond the realms of personal expression. The criticisms seemed focussed on the earlier manifestations of personal voice and seemed to resist, for a while at least, taking in the newer thinking.

Nowadays, the positioning of voice in terms of an either/or binary has moved on. While Prior (2001) offered a middle ground (focussing on the relationship *between* the personal and the social), to move the debate beyond the *sharp binary* of the personal and social, Elbow (2007) explained in his “Reconsiderations of Voice” that he had no appetite for this version of compromise. He argued that we should embrace all versions of voice and that we should learn from these contradictions and tensions rather than try to find a diluted version. Elbow, one of the original proponents of expressivism, who talked about voice with terms such as *juice* and *mother’s milk* in the 1970s took on a broader and perhaps more mature perspective thirty years on.

The contemporary era seems to encompass this wider and deeper interpretation of voice. Sperling and Appleman (2011) offer a useful definition of voice from which we can glean insights on voice meaning and relevance today. They contend: “Voice is a language performance – always social, mediated by experience, and culturally embedded” (p.71). This definition needs unpacking because it captures many of the layers of meaning and the possibilities of voice in contemporary education and society. Voice is a *language performance* and therefore it is both communication tool and about self-representation. The performance aspect is what Goffman (1956) outlines as the role adopted by an individual during human interactions which they deem appropriate to the situation and which serves to influence others. The performance or self-representation is not static and will vary according to the situation and the people involved. Sperling and Appleman also state above that voice is *always social, mediated by experience, and culturally embedded* and is therefore informed by historical or personal (individual perspective, experience and opinion) as well as cultural (the understanding that what forms us as individuals is informed by our cultural and social surroundings). The *always* gives the sense of a continuum. There is no final destination and voice therefore needs to be understood as both dialogical and dynamic. Meanings are not contained on the page but rather are contingent and provisional as part of a continuous dialogue. This captures the shift away from ideas of writing as text that is “disembodied language” (Elbow, 2007) to a view that the writing is always inextricably connected to the writer, the process of writing and the reader’s interpretation of it.

Hyland (2009) also discusses the culturally embedded dimensions of voice. Highlighting the differences between the early individually-centred understanding of voice and the contemporary socially-centred view, he advises: “instead of looking for textual evidence of the writer’s private self, identity is located in the public, institutionally defined roles people create in writing as community members” (p.71). He furthermore adds that: “writing takes on the discursive and epistemological features of a particular culture: how writers project an insider ethos and signal their right to be heard as competent members of a group” (p.71). This viewpoint is particularly insightful in the context of academic writing which is infused with institutional and disciplinary features (or voices) which can metaphorically cast out a piece of writing (if it doesn’t conform) or accept it and reward it when it meets the

standards. This view prevails in many parts of academia and, as Hyland also notes, it is the focus of most style guides which essentially tell students how to conform to these cultural norms. This understanding of voice casts light on a gap that exists in the academy. There may well be an understanding that academic writing is about more than *textual production* (Flowerdew and Wang, 2015) but, as discussed previously, academic writing continues to be seen principally in its role as a method of academic assessment and determining competence. As will be evidenced in the findings chapters of this thesis, students and academics are often focussed on the achievement of academic outcomes (grades or citations) rather than the process of learning. This gap in the academy is also an opportunity to redress some of the imbalances that have emerged.

Sperling and Appleman (2011) note that voice “invites ideological discussion” (p.71). They talk about the concept of voice as a metaphor for agency and discuss the issues of equity, access and power relations in the educational setting. The idea of membership within an academic community discussed above should also prompt us to consider that there are also those who do not feel like members and who feel like outsiders. This opens up a debate on how students in higher education may be given voice and empowered or how they may be silenced. The silencing of voices can be understood literally, for example in a classroom situation where the student is too intimidated to speak, or more metaphorically in their writing, where they do not include their own opinions but focus rather on summarising the views of others. The students who do not feel part of the community or who do not understand the accepted discourse of the community do not find their voice but accept the dominant voices without considering whether they are “concordant or conflicting” (Sperling and Appleman, 2011, p.71) with their own. Ivanic and Camps (2001) also raise this issue and argue for a critical awareness of voice in the teaching of writing. This, they maintain, will help student writers consider their disciplinary discourses but will also empower them to consider how they are representing themselves so they will not be excluded. In this way, the individual can exercise the power to conform or resist. In this way, the individual has agency. Their voice in the text is not merely present or resonant (as vaunted by the expressivist movement), their voice has become more deliberate and, in Freirean terms, emancipated.

What is apparent is that individually, socially and ideologically centred perspectives of voice can have pedagogical benefits for students and teachers in higher education. Voice can be used as a platform to help students to develop more awareness of their ideas and to take ownership of their opinions in their writing. Equally, voice can be used as a medium for understanding and re-producing discourses, for re-thinking the way texts are read and understood. In the contemporary context where students access information from multiple sources and digital platforms, there is a greater need to be aware of other voices (opinions and discourses) in the texts that they read and write. Finally, voice can help raise consciousness about power relations in the academy. It can help students and teaching staff to consider their positioning in the classroom and equally to consider the positionality of the voices in the texts that they read. With voice, the opportunities for learning, for development and for empowerment are rich and plentiful. This is voice's contribution.

2.4 Voice Metaphors

While the last section sketched the development of voice chronologically and introduced some of the key theoretical underpinning from which it can be understood, this section seeks to explore voice meanings more closely. This involves unpicking some of its many metaphors. Bowden (1995) notes that metaphors endure for good reason and that the metaphor for voice has endured because it has something to offer. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that metaphor, far from being a mere rhetorical flourish, is a useful everyday concept which helps us “structure how we perceive, how we think, and what we do” (p.4).

In my review of voice literature, I noted a preference for creating typologies of voice which often explain the concept in terms of “voice as” rather than “voice is”. Perhaps this habit in the literature signifies the complexity and temporality of voice. There is no “voice is” because voice means so many different things at different times. This next section takes looks at voice metaphors. It re-visits some of the points outlined above but it explores them in greater depth through particular metaphors which, in turn, are underpinned by an individually, socially or ideologically centred understanding of voice.

2.4.1 Voice as Individual Expression

This concept of voice emanates from an individually-centred perspective which privileges the individual's identity and self-awareness and relates voice to an accomplishment of writing and creative expression. The abiding belief among early proponents of voice was that it was important to growth and self-development and that developing a voice in writing was the key to good writing. Better writing involved self-expression and the key to self-expression was self-knowledge. Elbow (2007) argued that "with practice, people can learn to write prose that 'has a voice' or 'sounds like a person' and, interestingly, when they do, their words are more effective at carrying meaning" (p.176). This quote contains interesting elements which help pinpoint the meaning and relevance of voice conceived as individual expression. Elbow accords voice a central purpose in writing which is to carry meaning and to explain. For when we hear the text or indeed hear the writer, he argues, we don't have to work as hard to understand the meaning. Secondly, Elbow states that voice can be learned and improved with practice. Voice therefore forms part of the educational process as something he proposes can, and should, be learned by students. Elbow maintains that everyone has a *real voice* which can be brought into their writing. This real voice taps into the personal and tunes into the self. It resonates. Elbow (1998) explains that it is "the sound of a meaning resonating because the individual consciousness of the writer is somehow fully behind or in tune with or in participation with that meaning" (p.311). Similarly, Stewart (1972) made a distinction about *authentic voice* and its relationship with individual expression that is a possibility for everyone. This individual expression is the authorial presence and can evolve into the ability to write with a distinctive style. He notes: "your authentic voice is the authorial voice which sets you apart from every living human being despite the common or shared experiences you have with many others" (p.2).

Promoting individual expression was relatively straightforward within the domain of composition studies. The controversy arose when this concept of individual voice was encouraged in other parts of the academy where traditional modes of academic writing prevailed. It was part of the larger shift which saw increasing awareness of bias and the questioning of objectivity as well as an infusion of the personal into the

previously impersonal domain of academic writing. Voice was perhaps an easy target for disdain due to some of the rhetoric used to express its meaning. Early metaphors employed by the voice enthusiasts such as *juice*, *magic* and *mother's milk* were off-putting especially when trying to convince members of the academy that voice had a place in academic writing. Furthermore, the voice enthusiasts were equally dismissive of traditional academic writing. Hashimoto's (1987) criticism of the *evangelical zeal* and the "cashing in on the emotional spirit" (p.74) of the early proponents of voice has some validity as he notes terms such as *dull*, *faceless*, *boring*, *mechanical* that were used by the voice enthusiasts to describe traditional academic writing.

The intensity of some of the claims against traditional academic writing, while understandable in the context of the era and a drive to "free" writers, may have served only to alienate voice from more universal acceptance in university. These tensions distracted from the potential value of considering how individual expression of voice might help students develop their academic writing. Elbow's concept of *freewriting* - writing freely without restraint was designed to enhance freedom of expression and the flow of ideas and creativity of students – is a good example. While this process is now acceptable practice in many academic writing supports centres as a means to support struggling student writers, it was not considered to be sufficiently academic and was marginalised for years.

There is one metaphor not considered in Hashimoto's appraisal of voice metaphors that I believe offers a more useful concept of voice. Elbow (1998) uses the metaphor "to sing ourselves in" (p.282). This idea relates to his concept of writing with power and resonance. It is about writing with presence and about writers having a sense of self in their writing. I would add a further meaning to this metaphor (not necessarily part of Elbow's original concept). *Singing in* also evokes the idea of students tuning into the surrounding discourses and culture. The metaphor, thus conceived, has wider applicability to academic writing and academic writing support. Both meanings also help frame the notion of voice with authority because to write with authority a writer needs to have a sense of themselves as well as a sensibility to their surroundings.

2.4.2 Voice as Authority

A voice with authority in writing evokes the image of a writer with confidence and with opinion. Elbow (1994) describes a text with the voice of authority as one where “the writer displays the conviction or the self-trust or gumption to make her voice heard” (p.10). In the academic career trajectory, this is about the writers taking ownership of their views, a journey, as noted by Bartholomae (1986), as one of the most difficult for students. Writing with authority in academic writing involves two areas of growth. One involves an understanding of the language of the surrounding academic discourses so that student writers understand how to position their writing among existing texts. The second involves students having a sense of their own convictions and opinions. It is about them having something to say. Whitney (2011) speaks of it as the challenge of being able to situate one’s voice amongst others and claiming the right to speak.

The importance of developing familiarity with a disciplinary discourse is raised by Gee (2008) who argues that discourses are mastered through a kind of “enculturation (‘apprenticeship’) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse” (p.170). Bartholomae (1986) points out that students are expected to adjust often before they have developed sufficient knowledge or familiarity with the academic content or discourse. They have to “invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language” (p.5). Bartholomae also argues that students, as yet *uninitiated* with the practices and discourses of higher education, are asked to speak (and write) in voices that are not their own:

To speak with authority student writers have not only to speak in another's voice but through another's "code" and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in and before, at least in terms of our disciplines, they have anything to say. (p.17)

For Bartholomae, writing with authority takes time and a progressive development of knowledge. Without giving students adequate time and support to write with

authority, that is, write with a base of disciplinary knowledge as well as a familiarity with the disciplinary discourse, their writing becomes “more a matter of imitation or parody than a matter of invention and discovery” (p.11).

When Bartholomae speaks about this imitation, he describes it as writing that has come *through* the writer but is not *from* the writer. This places the writer as the central point - the person with something to say. Whitney (2011) describes having an academic voice as “the successful integration of the words and ideas of others, without loss of one’s own authority over the ideas” (p.187). Writing with authority, having a voice with authority, involves an amalgamation of disciplinary knowledge and self-knowledge. It is a process in which students negotiate their identities and find their own voices “amid the cacophony of voices and social roles around them” (Ritchie 1989, p.153).

Elbow (1994) maintains that the concept of voice with authority has no personal qualities and does not entail any theory of identity. I would question this on the basis that having an opinion (and equally *not* having one) relates directly to a student’s self-awareness, bias (conscious or unconscious) and therefore identity. Ivancic (1998) speaks of this in relation to students struggling to construct their own voice among the surrounding voices (discourses). Drawing on Bakhtin, she takes the view that student identity is constructed within its social reality. Like Bakhtin, she sees this as an interactive and dialogic process rather than something that simply happens to the student. Ivancic (1998) and Ritchie (1989) argue that the student writer’s discourse is not unique nor individual but rather that it comprises a mix of discourses that already exist and which are drawn together by every individual in a unique way. They call upon the evocative Bakhtinian metaphor of a “rich stew” to describe this process. The image is powerful. It conjures up the notion of an active and dynamic melting pot of ideas, cultures, influences and indeed voices that shape a student’s discourse.

At the beginning of their studies it can be difficult for students to navigate texts with multiple opinions and ambiguous concepts and to construct their own voice. They do not always have the maturity or sense of self to know what their opinions are never mind express them alongside existing views. This is part of a student’s learning in

higher education. It is an academic journey but it is also a personal journey in which students develop a sense of their own standing. Ritchie (1989) argues that the process of students negotiating discourse (and finding their voice) involves a process of socialisation and what she calls “individual becoming” (p.153). Like Bartholomae, she wants to see students develop and contribute to discourse rather than imitate it. Ivanic (1998) and Fernsten and Reda (2011) furthermore argue that the teaching of academic writing should help students develop a writer’s identity, that is, the identity of a person who writes who, in turn, can claim ownership and authority over what they write.

The concept of voice as authority raises a whole host of issues and layers of debates that continue to reverberate in higher education. Bartholomae’s view of writing with authority raises interesting questions about expectations of students in higher education and the practices of teaching and assessment. Ivanic’s take of voice and its relationship to identity development takes us far beyond the idea of individual writing accomplishment into a theoretical arena where conceptions of voice embrace wider cultural, social and historical contexts and where identity is understood as *multiple* and *constantly changing* (Flowerdew and Wang, 2015).

The next section further unpicks notions of voice and identity and explores the social and cultural influences that permeate voice and writing. Sperling and Appleman (2011) argue that voice is “inevitably shaped, informed, and mediated by social and cultural factors” (p.73). This dynamic is explored through the metaphor of voice as dialogue.

2.4.3 Voice as Dialogue: Who is Talking?

For Bakhtin (1981), it is not possible to consider voice solely in relation to an individual or to an individual utterance. While the expressivist perspective positions voice as an individual and internal process, the social perspective situates voice as part of an external dialogue, consistently and continually interacting with (and influenced by) its social environment. Prior (2001), drawing upon the work of Bakhtin, observes that voice is always “infused with evaluative perspectives, affective colorations, and indexical traces of all kinds” (p.60). Context therefore is

essential to the understanding of the voice and what is being said. Bakhtin (1981) argues that all words have a taste: “each word tastes of context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions” (p.293). Voice also has a taste. Voice tastes of the personal preferences, social identity and the history of the speaker. It tastes of the social environment and the discursal expectations of that environment. It tastes of the speaker’s intentions – what they choose to say and what they choose not to say. Voice, from this perspective, is less assured in its knowledge and it is more value-laden. The reader or listener must attend to multiple layers of complexity beyond what is said to interpret meaning. As Prior (2001) puts it, this perspective on voice moves us from “flat, depersonalized spaces into three-dimensional, peopled and historied landscapes” (p.70).

Bakhtin introduces us to the idea of *Heteroglossia* and multiple voices in writing. He argues that the words used by the individual always belong in part to someone else. The words are appropriated by the individual and can be used to fit the individual’s circumstances and intentions but prior to this they exist “in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions” (p.294). This notion of voice disentangles it entirely from its earlier manifestations as a motif for individuality and expression of true self. In the same way that Bakhtin argues that there are no voiceless words coming from a dictionary, it is equally true, from this perspective, that no writer can call his words entirely his own. Prior (2001) discusses *reenvoicing* in the context of academic writing and discusses the way which writers draw upon what has been previously written. He notes “written texts may be quite literally multi-voiced, the product of heterogeneous processes in which multiple texts and authors come to intermingle in a single text, even when it appears to have a single author” (p.68). He frames this discussion within the contemporary debate on plagiarism in university and suggests that more attention to voice and inter-textual relationships within academic writing could be useful in teaching academic writing

and supporting students to draw upon literature with a better understanding of how to do so.³

The Bakhtinian concept of *addressivity* introduces the concept of other voices permeating writing but it also introduces a sense of temporality to voice. What is voiced is always preceded by other voices and equally, is followed by others. It is part of an ongoing dialogue which continues indefinitely. Voice (and what is voiced) is constantly evolving and it remains open and unresolved. Meanings, even those in the past, are de-stabilised because they are open to re-interpretation within new contexts. This conception of voice is part of something greater that exists outside the individual's inner world and it is constantly re-defining itself.

In academic writing, students draw upon many voices and appropriate them as their own. They are, as Prior (2001) notes, revoicing though not necessarily with the knowledge of what they are doing. There is crossover here between voice as dialogue and voice with authority as both encompass a social perspective where the writers interact with their social surroundings. The voice of authority perhaps presents a dialogue where the writer interacts with other voices more consciously and more confidently. This relationship between the individual and his/her surroundings is explored further in the next section where a more critical standpoint is taken and where this social positioning is scrutinised for its dimensions of power and individual agency.

2.4.4 Voice as Power and Agency

Elbow (2007) discusses voice in terms of power from an individual perspective: “My voice is my true self and my rhetorical power” (p.168). He promoted *freewriting* to help students to find their voice in their writing and to empower themselves through their writing. He encouraged students to write freely without thinking about writing conventions and without thinking about the reader. He maintained that this approach

³ This debate on plagiarism and the difficulty experienced by students is brought to life in Chapter 5 through a second year student's narrative which recounts the lengths he and his classmates go to because they have a fear of plagiarism (see page 124).

would allow writers to tap into ideas and convictions without self-censoring and that it would allow them to express their thoughts without fear of exposure or ridicule. Finding voice and writing with power, from Elbow's perspective, is about freedom of expression. It is about freedom to think, feel and write first and then tidy later.

Elbow's notion of power must be distinguished from other socially and culturally embedded conceptions of voice as power, where the notion of freedom of expression extends beyond individual writing accomplishment. Voice as power in its ideological sense becomes a motif for issues of equity and social justice in education. From a Freirean perspective, the idea of voice in education relates to ideas of creating more equitable power relations within teaching. Freire (1996) rejected the traditional concept of education, what he called *banking* education with the student as a passive receptacle of the teacher's wisdom. This model, he argued, reinforced and reproduced the inequities of society and represented a distortion in societal power relationships. Freire promoted a more dialogic relationship between teacher and student wherein knowledge could be co-produced and power would be more equally distributed. In this relationship, students would actively build their knowledge and they would participate in their own development. They would question and they would be critical – creating an awareness of surrounding discourses and their influence on their social reality. Equally students would develop an understanding of how, among the surrounding voices, they might locate their own voice and be heard. This is what Freire (1996) called *problem-posing education* wherein “people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (p.64). This form of education was about cultivating a voice with power - a voice that is critical and action-oriented. It sought to overcome oppression and sought change. The voice with power was only possible through *conscientisation* whereby the student would become a critical thinker and would thereby be liberated.

It is worthwhile re-visiting Bartholomae's “Inventing the University” to explore some of his observations on power relations in the contemporary university context. Bartholomae (1986) refers to the teacher and student relationship and specifically the expectations upon the student writer (who has less knowledge and familiarity with

the disciplinary discourse) who is judged by a teacher “those of us with power and wisdom” (p.17). He also talks about the power and privilege associated with the academic discourse. One of the issues he notes is the way that university students have a feeling of disempowerment among the stronger, more practised and more articulate voices of the academy. He writes: “I think that all writers, in order to write, must imagine for themselves the privilege of being ‘insiders’ – that is, of being both inside an established and powerful discourse, and of being granted a special right to speak” (p.10). Bartholomae’s observations bring to light an important issue. While the importance of enculturation and the acquisition of academic discourse has been discussed above in relation to writing with authority, the point here is about a distortion of power and the continued reproduction of an existing structure. The point sheds new light on the way we consider teaching and academic assessments in university and the way systems and policies are developed to provide an education. Considering such educational practices from a voice perspective can provide a useful way to question current assumptions and to look at ways to empower students so that they feel they have the right to speak.

Ivanic and Camps (2001) discuss voice and writer agency in the context of university academic writing. Acknowledging that academic conventions and expectations can limit writer choices and expression, they argue nonetheless that each individual student writer “ultimately exercises individual agency to take elements from different voice types and blend them into a unique, heterogeneous voice according to their own interests, motivations, allegiances, and preferences” (p.21). Within the confines of the discipline, the writer has choice. The choice requires awareness – of the discipline (as argued by Bartholomae) but also awareness of the self. Developing a voice with power reflects a point at which the writer has developed a voice with authority as well as individual agency. This happens over time, with practice and also as a student’s writer identity evolves. Ivanic and Camps add an interesting dimension to the social positioning argument above as they discern the reproduction of social structures specific to the academic community. They note: “graduate students are at an intersection between two positions in the academic community, that of the ‘student’, the learner, the receiver of knowledge....and that of the ‘researcher’, the more established member of the community” (p.33). This social positioning, they argue, shapes students’ perception of their identity within the

academic community, their perception of their right to speak and ultimately their sense of the balance of power within the academic institution. Student voice in academic writing and power are therefore intertwined and must be understood as part of a bigger picture of identity, structure and agency. Unsurprisingly, Ivanic and Camps argue that writers must develop a critical awareness of voice. It is not *an optional extra*, they note, but an integral part of writing and reading texts.

If voice is considered as a metaphor for human empowerment, then it is important to consider the role of social positioning, cultural and social capital and how these societal structures both privilege and give voice to some but not to others. Problematizing voice means that while we consider those with a voice, we must also consider those that are voiceless in our society and equally within our academic institutions. In the field of education, voice has resonance with those striving for equality of access in education. In society, providing the opportunity for higher education to socially disadvantaged members of society is about redressing distortions of power. Voice in this respect is about bringing rights to all parts of society.

2.5 Frameworks for Understanding Voice

The purpose of the previous sections was to explore meanings of voice as well as some of the theoretical and ideological questions raised by voice. The purpose of this section is to take a more micro approach to voice and to present three theoretical frameworks in which voice is dissected and analysed in minute detail. The three frameworks give additional perspectives to the theoretical underpinnings set out above and enhance our understanding of the metaphors used to explore voice. Each framework has something useful to offer and all inter-connect with each other and with many of the theories already picked up in the chapter.

Elbow's five voices framework provides the opportunity to investigate the individually-centred perspective on voice but also updates it with Elbow's later thinking where he acknowledges the more social and ideological aspects of voice. Ivanic's framework of *Four Aspects of Writer Identity* brings us back to the interplay

between voice and identity. The framework breaks down different aspects of self (and potential for self) that exist in academic writing and which are potentially constrained but not necessarily determined by the rules of the discipline in which they write. Finally, Tang and John's typology of *Possible Identities behind the First-Person Pronoun in Academic Writing* captures what identity, authority and agency look like in academic texts.

All three frameworks provide a stronger sense of the layers of voice and help us see its applicability in higher education. It is worth noting also that from a methodological perspective, the frameworks served a practical purpose as they informed the research design and also the development of the interview questions.

2.5.1 Elbow's Five Voices

Elbow (1994) outlines five distinctive meanings of voice to aid its understanding but also to demonstrate that discussing voice in more simplistic terms is not helpful since the debates are not really applicable to all meanings of voice. He argues that in effect, it is really the fifth meaning of voice that urges the ideological disputes discussed above. The other four meanings, he notes, are "sturdy, useful, and relatively noncontroversial" (p.xx). The five voices identified by Elbow are: *audible voice*; *dramatic voice*; *distinctive voice*; *voice with authority* and; *resonant voice*.

The audible voice is the voice of the author we can sometimes hear in our mind as we read. It is the voice of a person, a physical presence in the writing. Elbow acknowledges that a speaking voice carries more opportunities to convey meaning through its voice "channels", for example through volume, pitch, accent and speed. However, he believes that the written voice, while it has of course fewer semiotic possibilities, nonetheless provides an important sense of the text. It carries important nuances through intonation, flow and emphasis which, Elbow argues, influence how we respond to the writing. It can furthermore help us to understand the text more easily. Hearing a voice, being led by a voice in the writing, helps us to understand it and to follow it more fluidly.

The dramatic voice is the sense we feel of the author's state of mind. If we acknowledge that a text is written by an author, this author, by implication, has a character and a state of mind that can be revealed in the text. We can have a sense, for example, if the author is emotional or angry. Reading academic essays, we can get a sense of a student writer that is hesitant or confident in their opinions. We can discern where a student is interested in a topic or perhaps just covering the topic to meet the assessment requirements.

The distinctive voice is a recognizable quality or a characteristic style of writing that alerts us to who the author is. This is not who the author actually is – it is not yet a question of identity or representation. Distinctive voice rather, is the voice that develops and becomes the writer's trademark. Especially in early expressivist literature this is the voice that is implied when there is a discussion about finding one's voice. Elbow is not overly effusive about the importance of distinctive voice. He admires the versatility of writers to use different voices in their writing and he explains that in composition studies, he tends to discourage students from seeking their distinctive voice as it leads to pretension and over-writing.

The voice of authority is not having a recognizable voice. It is about *having* a voice. On one hand this signifies where an author is speaking with conviction and with opinion. The author may draw upon other voices from existing literature and has the confidence and discursal familiarity to engage with others' views and perhaps include his or her own. Having a voice also means *taking* the authority to speak out. This has resonance with feminist writing and equally critical theorists and relates to ideological issues of power and equity. Interestingly, Elbow asserts that having a voice with authority is not about identity and does not necessarily relate to who the author actually is. He argues that identity is only a feature of his fifth voice. I don't agree. Before I argue this point I will summarise Elbow's fifth voice.

The final voice is the resonant voice which, according to Elbow, is the most contentious. This voice relates to authenticity, identity, presence and sincerity. It "involves making inferences about the present text and the absent writer" (p.xxxiv), but does not, he affirms, base this on any particular theory of identity. It relates the writing to discourse and the unconscious self. It is the part of the writing that

resonates with the reader and gives a sense of the writer's presence in the text. A key aspect of the resonant voice is sincerity. Elbow explains that the voice with resonance is sincere without sounding tinny and hollow. It is convincing and resonant because it is believable and because it has the potential to move us.

I believe that Elbow's framework adds significant value to our understanding of voice because it alerts us to some of the more subtle nuances of voice that can make us more discerning as a reader. However, I do not fully agree with the distinctions he makes between the fourth and fifth voice and I query the way he seems to work so hard to assert that identity is not present in the fourth. He notes that he wishes to separate the "solid from the swampy" (p.xxxiii) and to assert that there is a solid basis to accept the concept of voice. I question whether he is being slightly defensive here having drawn much criticism for his early expressivist theories. I think we enter the swampier terrain of identity when we move into the voice of authority. Elbow draws upon Aristotle's concept of *sincere* writing (which can also be faked) to separate the authoritative voice from the person. He distances the words from the author stating that it does not entail any theory of identity and furthermore that it does not require "making any inferences about the actual writer from the words on the page" (p.xxxii). I understand the muddiness of the notion of sincerity in writing and I understand Elbow's reticence about getting into identity theory here and yet I think identity is part of authority whether he likes it or not. To speak with opinion and conviction has to come from somewhere. The voice of authority carries elements of self even when it is contrived and "doesn't match the sense of who they really are" (p.xxxii).

It would feel wrong to end this section on a discordant note because Elbow's theoretical framework offers great insights and I agree with more of it than I question. The framework opens useful debate on the relevance of voice to academic writing. Elbow questions, for example, the acceptance of some of the academic writing conventions that seek to remove the writer from the text presenting us, he notes, with "voiceless, faceless text – to give us a sense that words were never uttered but rather just exist with ineluctable authority from everywhere and nowhere" (p.xxvii). This observation is noteworthy because it casts light upon one of the most confusing aspects of academic writing for novice writers namely, how to be

authoritative and critical in their writing while maintaining a distanced or objective stance. This observation is useful because it also forms part of the research questions in this study to see what students understand about the expectations of the academy in relation to their writing. It is relevant because it emerged as a finding in the research process as I encountered students who were confused and hesitant about their writing because they did not understand the boundaries.

Elbow's framework presents useful distinctions between different voices that we can discern in the text. These distinctions move us on from a conflated understanding of voice and provide us with better opportunity to question its place in academic writing. They offer us an opportunity to read text differently and to remain open to the unanticipated feelings or ideas that can surface when reading – or as Elbow puts it: “We hear a text if it gives us half a chance” (p.xxvii).

2.5.2 Ivanic's Framework of Identity and Self-Representation

Cherry (1998) argues that self-representation in writing is a “subtle and complex multi-dimensional phenomenon that skilled writers control and manipulate to their rhetorical advantage” (p.385). He argues, therefore, that a better understanding of self-representation in written text contributes to a more complete understanding of the text. Like Cherry, Ivanic (1998), sees academic writing as more than conveying content but as a means of representing the self. She articulates a view which places identity at the heart of academic writing and, like Elbow's family of voice meanings, distinguishes between different selves that exist in writing.

Ivanic's view of identity is intended to signify the “plurality, fluidity and complexity” (p.11) of the self in text. Her notion of identity is based upon the belief that it is affected by social practices, discourse and self-representation. Drawing upon the work of social constructionists, she highlights the belief that identity can be an individual creation. This is the belief that individual identity is the result of the individual's social context and the “particular beliefs and possibilities which are available to them in their social context” (p.12). Ivanic then takes a more critical turn, arguing that identity is not just socially determined but that it is socially constructed. She notes the implication of her belief: “this means that the possibilities

for the self are not fixed, but open to contestation and change” (p.12). This means that despite social practices and potentially limiting possibilities, there is always the potential for change. Ivanic also discusses the influence of discourse on identity and the continual interplay between the self and context and, within this relationship, the endless possibilities for the construction of text and the interpretation of it. She argues that “the self should not be conceived as something to be studied in isolation, but as something which manifests itself in discourse” (p.18). She notes that a writer’s choice of discourse is limited by their context, that is, within a given context there is a limited number of discourses that they will have access to. Furthermore, within the discourse, there are conventions and limitations that will have an influence on the writer’s construction of identity.

The second element of Ivanic’s theory of identity is based upon Goffman’s *Social Interactionist Theory* and the view that apart from the external elements such as social practices and discourses, identity is also derived from the self. She notes: “people ARE agents in the construction of their own identities” (p.19). She agrees with Goffman’s view that as individuals we have multiple identities and that we behave differently in different settings, that we adopt different roles. From an academic writing perspective, Ivanic proposes the idea of multiple selves as aspects of identity that exist in academic writing. In her framework, she outlines four selves. These are: *the autobiographical self*; *the discorsal self*; *self as author* and; *possibilities for self-hood*.

The autobiographical self relates to the writer’s identity which is influenced by his or her personal history. The autobiographical self is not a fixed embodiment of a ‘real self’. It is both temporal and socially constructed. It changes according to experience and situation and according to the life events that shape the writer’s perspective and ideas. Ivanic uses Goffman’s metaphor of *writer-as-performer*, that is, “the person who sets about the process of producing the text” (p. 24). This notion puts the person on the page and, as the first constituent of Ivanic’s typology, gives an indication of the proximity she perceives between the writer and the text.

The discorsal self is about the impression that the writer constructs of him/herself in the writing. For Ivanic, the act of writing itself is an act of *identity* and negotiating a

discoursal self, she contends, is an important aspect of the writing process which is informed by the autobiographical self as well as the social context. This self is discoursal because it is constructed through discoursal choices made by the writer and the identity that is created through the text (consciously or unconsciously) by the writer's alignment with particular subject positions. Once more drawing on Goffman's typology, Ivanic explains that the discoursal self relates to *writer-as-character*. Relating it to voice, she notes: "it is concerned with the writer's voice in the sense of the way they want to sound, rather than in the sense of the stance they are taking" (p.25). This resonates with Cherry's description of persona, - the role adopted by the writer, for example, a social role such as *student* or *expert* perhaps, which can change over time and equally can be different from one text to another.

The self as author is noted by Ivanic as particularly significant to academic writing since it is concerned with the writer's voice in the sense of having an opinion or belief established in the text. This aspect of identity overlaps with Elbow's voice of authority. It is the point at which writers claim or feel authoritative in their writing and establish their "authorial presence" (p.26). Ivanic makes the point that self as author has a relationship with the previous two selves. The extent to which a writer can establish authoritativeness is related to their autobiographical self, that is, their personal history and therefore prior experiences of learning for example. The self as author can also be viewed as one aspect of the discoursal self as the writer can consciously convey a sense of ownership of ideas and knowledge within the text.

The fourth aspect of writer identity is possibilities for self-hood. This element differs from the other three as it does not relate to the representation of the writer in the actual text but rather acknowledges the potential for change and the potential for altered voices in future texts. Temporality and instability are key characteristics of this self. Ivanic's inclusion of this self in the framework demonstrates her belief in the multi-faceted nature of identity. She notes: "it's not just a question of occupying one subject position or another, but rather of being multiply positioned by drawing on possibilities for self-hood on several dimensions" (p.26). Positioning and opinion are not fixed and there exists the possibility (over time and through experience) for change. The possibilities for self-hood might also be considered as a metaphor for

agency. While there may be limitations, for example in the extent the writer can express his or her opinion, future texts might yet reveal growth and development.

Ivanic's framework plays an important role in the design of the research questions. For example, Ivanic's self as author provided a basis for exploring participants' experience of feeling authoritative in their writing. During the interviews, as part of the discussion on the sample of writing, I asked participants about their representation in the text, how they presented their opinion and whether they felt confident doing so. Similarly, the possibilities for self-hood provided an added dimension for exploring whether a trajectory for the discovery and development of voice might exist within academic writing and for exploring academic writers' perceptions of changes in their approach to writing texts. The use of Ivanic's framework in this study means that identity is a key consideration. The four selves resonate and dovetail with aspects of Elbow's voices and they also relate to the final framework by Tang and John which deconstructs different modes of self-representation through use of the personal pronoun in writing.

2.5.3 Tang and John's Typology of Six Voices

Tang and John (1999) see identity as an integral part of academic writing and believe, like Ivanic that there are opportunities for the negotiation of identity and agency in academic writing - despite the limitation and conventions - through a range of discursal choices available to the writer. They present a typology of voices that relates specifically to academic writing and examine the use of the personal pronoun in academic texts based on earlier ideas of Ivanic. Their framework sets out six distinct voices reflecting different roles of the student academic writer. Tang and John draw upon the work of Cherry (1998) and his distinction between *ethos* and *persona* in writing. For Cherry, *ethos* reflects the personal characteristics of a writer comprising wisdom, a good moral character and establishing credibility with the reader. *Persona* is the role that a writer adopts while producing a text. This might be a societal role (mother, child), it may be a discourse role (the identity adopted through participation or association with a particular discourse community such as medical) and finally, it might be a genre role (relating to a specific genre in a discourse community such as the academic essay). Tang and John opt to focus their

work and establish a framework that illustrates the genre role and specifically that of the academic essay.

The figure below is taken from Tang and John’s typology of possible ‘I’ identities. I have reproduced their illustration here because it clearly differentiates the ‘I’ roles but also simultaneously rates the six voices in a continuum according to their level of authorial presence. The Tang and John definition of authorial presence is based on Ivancic’s ideas but is developed further through their own research. The inclusion of a reference to “powerful authorial presence” denotes their interest in power relations within academic writing. They explain that a powerful authorial presence is one where “the writer displays a high level of authority within the text”. This level of authority is derived from knowledge and expertise in the field but also relates to upholding “a right to control or command others” (p. S26). The other voices are rated according to the level they demonstrate this authority in the text and according to the degree they reflect authorial power. They are explained below.

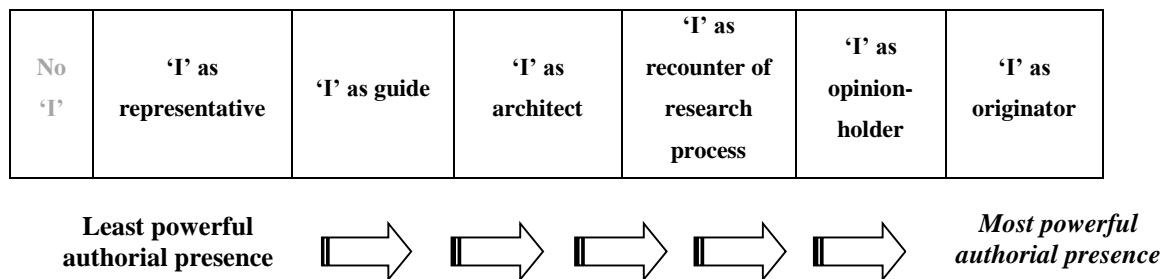


Table 1 Tang & John’s Typology of Voices

The first identity from the continuum that is discussed by Tang and John is ‘I’ as *representative*. They explain that this is the generic first person pronoun which also includes the plural form of ‘we’ or ‘us’. It relates to general statements of universal understanding. On the authorial power continuum, it occupies the position of least powerful in terms of authorial presence since it is just a reiteration of what is generally accepted. The ‘I’ as *guide* adopts the role of a tour guide directing the reader through the essay and pointing the reader’s attention to the essay’s key points. While there is evidence of a writer’s presence in the text, there is scant sense of ownership. The ‘I’ as *architect* denotes a role like the guide but with a more pronounced presence. While the guide might direct you through the material, the

architect takes more ownership of its construction and organisation. Tang and John exemplify the architect thus: “In this essay, I will discuss...”

The ‘I’ as *recounters of the research process* becomes more apparent as students undertake their own research or do dissertation projects. This writer describes the research process and how they obtained their data. It occupies a more ‘powerful’ place on the continuum because it places the researcher or writer in the process. While it may only be a brief appearance, it removes some of the distance adopted in traditional academic writing. The ‘I’ that is *opinion-holder* uses the personal pronoun to explain his or her beliefs. They might agree or disagree with established facts for example. This use of the personal pronoun displays some authority and marks the development of an individual voice. This ‘I’ is the same as Ivanić’s *self as author*. There is evidence of critical thinking and engagement here and there is evidence of developing knowledge and expertise in the field of study. The most powerful on the Tang and John continuum is ‘I’ the *originator*. This is where the writer has the strongest authorial presence as he or she has claims to expertise in the field and in addition to producing new knowledge. The originator takes clear ownership for the ideas presented in the text. For Tang and John, this is the most powerful because it denotes writers’ choice to present their thoughts for the scrutiny of others while aligning themselves with existing writers or experts in the field. Originators are powerful because they are accountable for their ideas and because they stand up to be counted.

The Tang and John typology is effective in the way it makes explicit the different uses of the personal pronoun in text. While we may have sensed different nuances of ‘I’ when reading, it is helpful nonetheless to have a guide which deconstructs the pronoun and aids our understanding of the text as well as our consideration of the writer’s positioning and identity. On more theoretical and ideological levels, the typology of six voices prompts us to examine the importance of student voice in academic writing. Noting the ongoing debate on whether the personal pronoun has a place in academic writing, Tang and John suggest that the use of ‘I’ should not be a matter of contention but rather that the focus should be upon which type of ‘I’ should be employed.

Tang and John see a role for writing education programmes in higher education which encourage students to be critical thinkers, writers and meaning-makers. The way to do this is to move away from traditional writing forms which encourage students to distance themselves from the text and to imitate existing disciplinary discourse. Tang and John see an opportunity to “make students aware that there is an alternative to this positivist view of meaning, while still leaving to them the ultimate decision of which view to subscribe to” (p. S33). This critical awareness of language and identity is a way to empower students to think and create their own meanings. It is a way to move students from the least powerful modes of expression to the more powerful levels of authorial presence.

Tang and John’s framework contributes to this study because it raises practical, theoretical and ideological questions in a similar way as do the frameworks of Elbow and Ivancic. Each framework reminds us not to conflate the meaning of voice. By showing the complexity of voice, each framework ultimately helps us to understand voice better. The Tang and John typology made a unique contribution to this dissertation. Its deconstruction of the personal pronoun helped my understanding of the participants’ sample writing in a way that I would not have otherwise considered. In one of the interviews, for example, it stimulated an insightful discussion with a postdoctoral researcher where he reflected on his own academic journey by considering his use of the personal pronoun as he went from undergraduate to Masters to PhD (see page 150). This discussion and the Tang and John typology thus helped frame some of the findings relating to the development of voice along the academic trajectory in a way that I might not otherwise have imagined.

2.6 Concluding Remarks

Bowden (1995), referring to the different conceptions and meanings of voice writes: “The distinctions are seemingly endless and often more confusing than illuminating” (p.187). Reviewing the literature on voice has been simultaneously confusing and illuminating. The literature presents contradictions and contrary views. It presents distracting debates among academics and occasionally provides some awkward voice metaphors that have the potential to alienate readers from the concept of voice

rather than encourage their interest. However, among all the noise, it is apparent that voice has a lot to say. Voice raises important questions about education, about academic writing and about teaching practices. The questions are practical, theoretical and ideological. While we might argue about the role of voice in academic writing, we cannot completely ignore it.

Early debates created a binary of voice as an individual or social phenomenon but since then more complex meanings are associated with voice and the earlier criticisms of voice as a distracting self-indulgence are made redundant. Sperling and Appleman's (2011) definition presents a useful, contemporary view of voice: "voice is a language performance – always social, mediated by experience and culturally embedded" (p.71). The reality today is that voice is both individually and socially-centred and more. Voice has a part to play in education, in society, and in new modes of individual expression. The lines denoting boundaries between individual and society and between society and education are continually blurring and voice permeates all without acknowledging borders.

As we can see from the development of digital media and changing forms of education, the meanings of voice are continuing to evolve as are the technological media for individual and mass communication. Voice is a relevant, live issue and a greater appreciation of it can enhance teaching and education. From an individual perspective, helping students to find and to develop their voice can enhance their engagement with the curriculum and their own self-development. Students learning to write with authority are developing their opinions and criticality. These are not skills that are useful purely for higher education assessment but tools that we need to encourage in twenty-first century citizens who need to decipher multiple voices and messages in the media. From a socio-cultural perspective, voice is relevant in our understanding of how students navigate institutional and disciplinary discourses. It helps us to remember that our expectations of students can be demanding and that a key part of their learning is not just the content but about getting to grips with the surrounding discourses. From an ideological perspective, considering voice serves as a useful reminder of our moral obligations to teaching and to students. Considering voice critically prompts us to be reflexive about our teaching and to question whether we encourage student voice or whether we suppress it.

This chapter has explored voice in several ways. It has shown that it is not possible to conflate the meanings of voice and argue *for* or *against* voice without framing it contextually, chronologically or theoretically. The purpose of this chapter was to develop a better understanding of voice by drawing upon existing literature. Its purpose was to situate my research within existing research and to present an authoritative piece of writing so that my voice might be more convincing and more informed. Writing and researching this chapter has benefitted me more than I had anticipated. By undertaking this trawl of literature, I made my own discoveries and developed my ideas and understanding of voice. This literature review is therefore about a discovery and development of voice in its own right and my research benefits from this richer understanding of voice which broadened my initial focus of voice as a form of individual expression and expanded it into a more complex concept with social, cultural and ideological underpinnings. Consequently, I see plentiful opportunities for other practitioners and policy-makers in higher education to give voice the consideration that it merits and to engage with the different meanings and interpretations. There is such potential for voice to add value and perspective.

Chapter 3

On Narrative and its Place in this Research

3.1 Introduction

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) outline the importance of narrative research as a methodology that brings “theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experiences as lived” (p.3). A narrative approach offered the perfect opportunity to give life to stories and to capture the *complexity* and *richness* (Webster and Mertova, 2007) of human experience within the university setting. As I saw it, narrative inquiry offered a way of providing a snapshot of the participants’ realities in higher education today and provided an opportunity for participants to voice their opinions through this research.

When I began to consider using narrative as a methodology, the idea took root seamlessly despite cautions about it being a difficult method lacking in both definitional and methodological certainty (Andrews et al., 2008) and despite my earlier intentions to use phenomenology as my methodological approach in my research proposal. The choice of narrative offered me something which ultimately far outweighed the disadvantage of changing research methodology because it initiated an interest in narrative research which will continue beyond this research project and will hopefully be part of other research projects in the future. While Andrews et al. (2008) discuss the complexities of narrative research, they also disclose their passion for revealing the often-contradictory layers of meaning that are captured in narrative research. Their explanation below encapsulates my aims in this research and my attraction to this methodology:

We frame our research in terms of narrative because we believe that by doing so we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change. By focusing on narrative, we are able to investigate not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed; and how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted. (p.1)

Andrews et al. resonate with the sentiments of other narrative researchers (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin and Riessman, 2006; Moen, 2006 and Riessman, 2008) who view the narrative approach as offering a means to draw together individual stories or personal narratives with the bigger picture. The bigger picture can comprise the pervading cultural and social narratives, the often taken for granted institutional discourses and, within the university environment, the departmental or disciplinary norms or accepted rules of play.

The choice of narrative and its place in this research is discussed in this chapter in two parts. The first part relates to the individual human-centred stories; the second part explores the context and types of influences which can influence individual narratives. This chapter also discusses researcher voice and positionality. It provides a brief account of my interest in voice and interaction with this project so that readers might better understand how I have influenced the research process and findings. Before this discussion however, it is useful to focus on narrative as a methodology. The next section looks at narrative definitions, how narrative works as a research methodology, how it shapes the research, what are its drawbacks and where it brings value.

3.2 Towards a Definition of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is about story and about human experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) see narrative inquiry as “a way of characterizing the phenomena of human experience” and as the most appropriate way to study experience because, as they see it, “humans are storytelling organisms, who individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p.2). As noted throughout the literature (Riessman, 2008; Andrews et al., 2008 and Squire et al., 2014) there is no singular definition for narrative inquiry and as a methodology it is continually evolving. However, it is possible to draw out some broader definitions here to frame this research and my understanding of narrative inquiry. The next section explores some definitions. It then looks more closely at the usage of the terms *story* and *narrative* in the literature and discusses how they are treated in this research.

Defining narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) write:

It is equally correct to say 'inquiry into narrative' as it is 'narrative inquiry'. By this we mean that narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study. (p.2)

Connelly and Clandinin explain here that narrative is about the story of an experience or experiences but it is simultaneously a research method with its own procedures for collecting and analysing data “which entails a view of the phenomenon” (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p.477). Moen (2006) agrees that narrative research is essentially the study of how we experience the world and she adds that the role of the narrative researcher is therefore to “collect these stories and write narratives of experience” (p.2).

Moen’s quote here introduces one of the areas of definitional ambiguity that arise in narrative research which relates to usage of the terms *story* and *narrative*. There are different views in the literature. Some narrative inquirers (see Reissman, 2008) use the terms interchangeably and do not make any distinction. Squire et al. (2014) similarly opt to use story and narrative interchangeably and deliberately. They argue that stories themselves are inevitably shaped, structured and constructed by the storyteller and therefore inherently have elements of narrative construction. Because they feel it is not always possible to cleanly delineate where a story ends and a narrative begins, they opt to leave it unresolved.

However, Squire et al. (2014) do acknowledge that it also can be useful in research to differentiate “the ‘what’ of stories (content) with the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of ‘narratives’” (p.25). Other narrative researchers maintain a distinction between story and narrative seeing story as a sequence of events and narrative as the organised interpretation of these events. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain below:

To preserve this distinction, we use the reasonably well-established device of calling the phenomenon “story” and the inquiry “narrative.” Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience (p. 2).

Moen (2006) similarly differentiates the terms. She argues that there is a process involved in creating a narrative and that this process entails a collaboration between the researcher and the research participant. The narrative is co-constructed. She notes: “The story has been liberated from its origin and can enter into new interpretive frames, where it might assume meanings not intended by the persons involved in the original event” (p.6).

In this research, I have taken my cue from Moen and Connolly and Clandinin. The narratives that are presented in Chapter 5 of this dissertation are co-constructed. The research participants shared their stories and I organised these stories and framed them with my interpretations. The stories are organised into “meaningful episodes” and the stories of experiences have been “interpreted and infused with meaning” (Moen, 2006).

3.3 Background of Narrative Inquiry

Andrews et al. (2008) situate contemporary narrative research in relation to its antecedents to explain its origins and its offering. The first antecedent of narrative lies in the development of post-war humanist approaches with a human focus and a greater interest in the words, thoughts and feelings of the individual. Narrative research is focussed on the individual. It explores an individual’s take on the world and their way of organising and making sense of their experiences through story. Narrative inquiry has a clear Interpretivist leaning too and its emergence correlates with the *paradigm shift* (see Kuhn, 1970) from positivism to interpretivism in the last century. Narrative research employs a close-up lens to help understand experience and emphasises the existence of a mix of perspectives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claimed that the grand social inquiry methods were reductive of experience. Since experience happens narratively, they argued, it should therefore be studied narratively. Through narrative inquiry they sought to place the story - in all its subjective glory - as the source of research data.

The second antecedent relates to the postmodern approaches which developed in qualitative research in the 1960s and 1970s. Postmodernism and poststructuralism

challenged the conception and nature of knowledge and fragmented previous acceptance of truth and reality based on 'established' facts. Their focus was on the influencers of knowledge - the influences of discourse, culture and personal experience on an individual's perceptions - and their questioning raised up issues of power and identity. Epistemologically speaking, narrative inquiry is set firmly within a postmodernist framework. It challenges worldviews and seeks to unearth human complexities rather than generalise them. It is also interested in situating the human stories and therefore delves into how contextual influences shape individual perceptions. Narrative's postmodernist origins mean that we do not just look at the story offered by the narrator. We look as well to the influences on the story both conscious and unconscious. Goodson (2012) talks about the importance of narratives being seen as the social constructions that they are, that is, "located in time and space, social history and social geography" (p.6). Beyond the story and the storyteller, there are other voices and stories that are discernible through the text. Andrews et al. (2008) observe: "the storyteller does not tell the story, so much as she/he is told by it" (p.3).

3.4 A Framework for Narrative Inquiry

Connelly and Clandinin's work draws heavily upon Deweyan theory. They see, as did Dewey, that education, experience and life are all intertwined and they use Deweyan concepts of *continuity* and *interaction* as the basis of their narrative inquiry framework.

The principle of continuity according to Dewey (1998) is essentially that each experience takes something from previous experiences and influences the experiences that follow it. Each experience accordingly has a past, a present and a future. Clandinin and Connelly adopt this meaning in their framework and see individuals and their experiences within a continuum of time. The second principle guiding the interpretation of experience is interaction. Dewey defines this as the interplay between the individual and his or her environment. It is not merely accounting for the contextual factors that might exist in the backdrop; it is understanding the influence of the context and (crucially) exploring the interaction

between individuals and their environment. Moen (2006) explains that narratives must be understood in relation to the narrator's "past and present experiences, her or his values, the people the stories are being told to, the addressees, and when and where they are being told" (p.5). Narratives therefore must be understood in terms of this dialogic and dynamic interplay both with the past, with the environment but also with the reader who, depending on his/her context and time will interpret findings differently. In this thesis, my role has been co-constructor of the narratives in the research process as my questions influenced the stories that were told. Additionally, I have interpreted the narratives and added my commentary. In my presentation of the research, I have endeavoured to clearly delineate my commentary so that other readers of these narratives can easily distinguish where my words join the words of the participants. The readers can then make their own judgements.

Dewey's two-criteria framework of experience forms the basis for Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. In this framework, narrative inquirers would use "a set of terms that pointed them backward and forward, inward and outward and located them in a place" (p.54). This three-dimensional space allows for the description of external environment and inner thoughts of both the research participants and the researcher. It facilitates a research time travel where themes can transcend linear timelines and can weave from present day observations through memories of the past and hopes for the future. What Clandinin and Connelly seek to emphasise is the temporal and spatial fluidity of narrative inquiry which engages with experiences past and present.

3.5 Features of Narrative Inquiry

There are some key features of narrative inquiry that distinguish it from other types of qualitative research and which have an influence on the research design of a narrative research project. While some features have been mentioned already, they are highlighted here and considered in more detail.

3.5.1 Social and Personal

In narrative inquiry, it is important to acknowledge the inextricability of the social and personal experience and perspectives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write:

Both the personal and the social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context. (p.2)

Within the research, the individual stories cannot sit separately but must be situated within a wider framework of social, cultural and institutional discourses. Reissman (2008) notes that in narrative research, the particularities of circumstance and context come to the fore. These voices (among others) should be interrogated and represented. She observes that good narrative analysis “prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of a text, and there is a move toward broader commentary” (p.13). Moen (2006) also refers to the *multivoicedness* of narrative research commenting that beyond the immediate voice of the narrator we should consider the other voices of the narrator’s past (shaped by knowledge and experience) and also that we should consider them as part of collective stories “that are shaped by the addressee and the cultural, historical and institutional settings in which they occur” (p.5).

3.5.2 Temporality

In narrative, temporality is a key feature and is crucial to the understanding of the story. This applies to the context - what is happening at a given time and how this is interpreted by the participants involved. It also refers to the readers of the research and how their place in time will influence their reading and interpretation of the stories. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), experience is temporal but so also is our understanding of experience. Acknowledging Geertz for the introduction of *tentativeness* in their research, they note “what we knew at one point in time shifts as the parade moves temporarily forward to another point in time” (p.17). Therefore, in narrative research facts are not presented in black and white terms. Findings are presented tentatively with the understanding that the meanings made or construed at a given time or situation might alter.

Carr (1986) discusses temporality from another vantage point and adds an additional layer of complexity. He argues that as we live our lives in the present, we have to take things as they come and live events. By telling stories of these events, we create a narrative and become narrator. The narrator of events “in virtue of his retrospective view, picks out the most important events, traces the causal and motivational aspects among them and gives us an organised coherent account” (p.59). The experience becomes a narrative that is created and co-created in the research process. The narrator connects previously disconnected events and it is through this narrative that we look for meaning.

3.5.3 Ambiguity and Contingency

The temporality and situatedness of narrative research gives rise to meanings that are contingent and ambiguous. Rather than taking a black and white view, narrative resides in the grey and this grey is in itself ever changing in tone and texture. For Clandinin and Connelly, the narrative three-dimensional space of inquiry cannot be boxed off. It must remain open and this serves to remind us, they note, “to be aware of where we and our participants are placed at any particular moment – temporally, spatially, and in terms of the personal and the social” (p.89). The ambiguity then, is the wedge in the doorway that keeps the possibilities for the research and the meanings to be created open indefinitely.

Polkinghorne (1988) argues that the more traditional measures of qualitative research do not apply to narrative. Instead of presenting data that is *valid* and *reliable*, he picks up Van Maanen’s (1988) concept of *verisimilitude* which is about producing findings that appear to be true or seem right given the circumstances and the context. The research therefore presents narratives that are open to interpretation. Polkinghorne (1988) remarks that a finding is *significant* if it is *important* (p.176). Therefore, if something is important to the storyteller or the researcher it should be represented.

3.5.4 Human-Centred

Another distinguishing feature of narrative inquiry is its human-centeredness. For Connelly and Clandinin (1990) “narrative and life go together” (p.10). Webster and Mertova (2007) note that most people enjoy a story. They mean that stories have been, and continue to be, an important facet of our civilisation and our culture. The stories of individuals reveal their experiences and their thoughts on these experiences. The stories reflect growth and understandings and it is these understandings, they argue, that provide powerful insights often not picked up in other modes of inquiry. Bruner (2002) provides a lovely summation of narrative and story-telling and its important place in the human story:

Narrative knowledge allows and encourages human connections. One shared story often triggers the telling of other stories by involved listeners, facilitates memories and reflections on past experiences, if only silently.
(p.145)

In narrative research, human stories are presented in this vein. They are there to be listened to and interpreted and may bring about reflections and awareness.

3.6 Criticisms of Narrative Inquiry

As Webster and Mertova (2007) note, narrative inquiry is not without its controversy. It is not necessarily widely accepted that the story has an accepted place as a source of data. The first criticism relates to subjectivity. Questions arise over researcher subjectivity in choosing which story should be told and which should not. Gottlieb and Lasser (2001), for example, criticise the privileging of certain voices in narrative research. They argue that this goes against the grain of narrative inquiry’s postmodern origins because, as they see it, narrative researchers privilege certain voices over others. Questions also arise over participant subjectivity. After all, there are two sides (at least) to every story but the narrator presents his or her version and the researcher, in turn, chooses what to include and relate.

Narrative research is highly subjective but rather than try to deflect such charges, narrative researchers celebrate its subjectivity and argue that it is part of its richness

and part of its value. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) further argue that to “dismiss criticisms of the personal and interpersonal in inquiry is to risk the dangers of narcissism and solipsism” (p.10). Narrative researchers therefore need to argue for the values that the narrative approach brings. They need to highlight how narrative research sits comfortably within a postmodern worldview which embraces multiple truths, multiple voices and tolerance for ambiguity. Subjectivity need not be an inadequacy but, when treated with integrity and attention, can offer an insightful and authentic take on human experiences.

The second criticism of narrative research is probably more accurately described as a caution since it was raised by Clandinin and Connelly, among the chief architects of narrative inquiry. They advise narrative researchers to avoid the temptation of “the Hollywood plot”. This refers to the temptation to contrive a happy ending or indeed an ending of any kind in the research. While all qualitative research to varying degrees relies on a researchers’ subjective presentation of findings, with narrative research there is perhaps a greater risk of researchers getting caught up in the story and driving a conclusion they would like to see. Narrative research is open-ended. The story continues after the research and the participants move on. There is no guarantee that things work out and as researchers, Clandinin and Connelly argue, it is not our place to insert a sense of closure.

3.7 Narrative’s Place in this Research

3.7.1 Narrative, Personal Experience and Identity

Bruner (2004) claims that narrative research is a key method for interpreting, structuring and understanding experiences. Moss and Pittaway (2013) argue that a narrative approach recognises the “legitimacy and power of an individual’s experience, and the role this individual experience can have as a catalyst for reflection and insight” (p.1009). The research objectives of this project relate to lived experiences and perspectives on experiences specifically in relation to voice in academic writing. Narrative inquiry not only enables us to understand the research

participants' experience of writing but also provides the opportunity for participants to tell their story. Through the research, the participants become storytellers with something to say and valid perspectives to offer. Potentially disparate experiences or thoughts are united through the questions of this research. By telling their story, participants can make sense of events and experiences that might otherwise have remained disconnected or unexplored. They can tell a story that might otherwise have remained untold. This is an exciting and compelling aspect of narrative research and it is these stories that ultimately have given this thesis its potency and its value.

Riessman (2008) states that "individuals and groups construct identities through storytelling" (p.8). Dyson and Genishi (1994) believe that "stories help us construct ourselves" and furthermore that they can help us to "evaluate and integrate the tensions inherent in experience" (p.242). This aspect of narrative research which links it firmly to identity and identity formation is another reason that this methodology dovetails so well with the research focus. Questions of identity and the discovery of self are connected to the discovery of voice. As narrative research draws out personal stories and reflects upon their situatedness, it reveals aspects of individual and group identities. This research presents an opportunity to read the stories of the individual participants and to understand how they identify themselves as students, graduates or academic professionals within their academic institution. These stories therefore offer us a vista on academic writing life and give us a close-up view of lived experience of it. Again, Dyson and Ganeshi (1994) put it beautifully as they describe their experience at the culmination of their research collecting peoples' stories: "This book has been filled with crossroads, places where people meet, bringing their pasts, their differences, their hopes, their distinctive disciplines" (p.242). It is these crossroads within the university environment where students and academic staff meet with their diverse experiences and different understandings that make the personal stories of this thesis worth listening to.

3.7.2 Narrative Inquiry and the Bigger Picture

Riessman (2008) states: “connecting biography and society becomes possible through the close analysis of stories” (p.10). She draws on Bruner to explain that it is only possible to really make sense of personal narratives by regarding the *deep structures* that is, the cultural, community and institutional mores that surround them. Individual experiences happen neither arbitrarily nor in isolation. Riessman notes that good narrative analysis lends itself to an examination of the broader commentary surrounding the story. The close exploration of such individual experiences can provide important insights upon such structures and conventions and can therefore help them to be more fully understood. This means that there is a focus not only on the stories as related by the individuals but also on the individual’s meaning-making within the stories. Within the stories and the telling of the stories, the surrounding discourses and culture are discernible and revelatory.

This symbiosis between individual and context which lies at the heart of narrative research connects it naturally to the objectives of this dissertation. What is powerful about narrative research is its capacity to give a snapshot of an individual’s experience at a certain time in a certain place. It captures the small story and the big story and shows that the big story itself comprises many different stories and discourses. As Churchman and King (2009) note, “organisations are sites of multiple narratives which range from dominant public stories to private identity-related stories” (p.508). These *corporate narratives* have a story to tell too as they have a bearing on how education is positioned, delivered and prioritised. In the case of academic writing for example, the corporate narratives might have an impact on the institutional approach to academic assessment for students. Similarly, in relation to academic staff, they might influence the positioning and recognition of academic writing and published research. Many have written about the complex and multiple (often conflicting) drivers and discourses within universities (Ball, 2005; Clegg, 2009; Deem, 2001; Meek, 2000). These institutional discourses include pervasive performative, economic and marketised discourses that shape the way higher education is delivered and positioned. The exploration of these discourses and their relationship to the personal narratives provide a useful view upon higher education today.

Beyond the more immediate institutional influences, narrative research's bigger picture must also take stock of the wider context which encompasses cultural conventions and values situated in these surroundings and at this point in history. Phoenix (2008) writes about the taken for granted assumptions, what Bruner (2004) calls *canonical narratives* that are also revealed in narrative research. She uses the example of an interview where the research participant clearly positions herself and her worldview (in this case opposed to racism) because it is the socially accepted viewpoint to take. Bruner relates this instability in the personal story to its susceptibility to wider contextual influences. These influences help us to create stories from events and then to organise them in a way that aligns with our surroundings. This *cultural shaping* adds another layer of complexity to understanding the personal narratives of this research as well as the institutional stories that emerge alongside them. The analysis of the text therefore, must acknowledge the instinct among participants to say what they consider acceptable and to put forward a version of themselves that tallies with the institutional culture.

Interrogating the layers of contextual influences therefore is an integral part of this research but the levels of complexity do not end here. Beyond the small story and the big story, narrative research also emphasises the importance of the role of the researcher in the construction of the story and the presentation of findings. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) discuss the "multiple I's" in narrative research and underline the importance of representing the many voices of the researched as well as the researcher's own voice:

We are, in narrative inquiry, constructing narratives at several levels. At one level it is the personal narratives and the jointly shared constructed narratives that are told in the research writing, but narrative researchers are compelled to move beyond the telling of the lived story to tell the research story. (p.10)

This quotation captures the layers of narrative research and the need to clearly delineate the researcher's presence in the text (discussed in section 3.10). Similarly, the quotation above talks about the research story. This comprises the process of gathering and interpreting the data (outlined in the next chapter). Part of the research story also involves consideration of the ethical implications of narrative research. I

also outline the ethical procedures and considerations that formed part of this research process in Chapter 4 but include a discussion on the ethical implications of narrative research from a methodological perspective next.

3.8 Ethics in Narrative Inquiry

Squire et al. (2014) write that narrative research is imbricated in ethical positioning. Clandinin (2006) writes that ethical concerns “permeate narrative inquiry from one’s own narrative beginnings through negotiations of relationships to writing and sharing research texts” (p.52). What Clandinin clearly sets out here are the responsibilities of the researcher from the outset of the narrative inquiry through each stage of the research process and beyond with his/her subsequent publications. She also means that narrative researchers need to consider their ethical responsibilities beyond mere adherence to institutional ethical procedures and to take ownership for their role in the research process, their contribution to the interpretation and presentation of findings and their accountability for the well-being of the research participants involved. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provide a useful framework for considering ethical concerns in narrative inquiry using the term *relational responsibility*. Again, these relational responsibilities should be understood as enduring in the sense that the researcher has responsibilities to the participants at all stages of the research process and subsequently. The relational responsibilities frame an attitude of caring and respectfulness. They involve considerations that are humane which place the onus on the prevention of harm or detriment to the research participants. They keep the well-being of participants in sharp focus, not to be overtaken by other more instrumental drivers. Clandinin (2006) outlines what taking responsibility for relations and relationships look like in practice. She writes:

For those of us wanting to learn to engage in narrative inquiry we need to imagine ethics as being about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices. We need to learn how to make these stories of what it means to engage in narrative inquiry dependable and steady. We must do more than fill out required forms for institutional research ethics boards (p.52).

In a similar vein, Josselson (2012) talks about the importance of having an *ethical attitude* in narrative research. Again, she is drawing the researcher to move beyond procedural requirements into a space of protecting the research participants' interests. This is a space where the researcher is thinking through how research participants will be respected and honoured in the research process. This entails narrative researchers endeavouring to "conduct research with other people rather than on them" (p.559).

In practice, an ethical approach in narrative inquiry involves several considerations. The first of these relates to the researcher's awareness of his/her role and contribution to the research process. The *multiple voices* highlighted above by Clandinin (2006) relate to the understanding that narratives are co-constructed. There is therefore a need for clear acknowledgement of the presence of the researcher's own voice in the research process. This involves the articulation of positionality but also involves a description of the methodology and the methods. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note: "The way in which the interviewer acts, questions and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience" (p. 110). Before the researcher gets to the stage of analysing and interpreting findings, he/she has an influence on what the narrative becomes.

A second consideration involves a declaration of the researcher's motivations and intent. This should be clearly defined and stated in advance of any interactions with research participants. This aspect of ethical responsibility is often encompassed by institutional procedures and includes a statement about the research project to inform the research participants about the nature of their involvement. Ethical procedures have a requirement for the completion of an Informed Consent form (outlined in the next chapter). It could be argued that intent can never be fully informed given that research projects evolve over time (my own research project shifted its research focus) but the narrative researcher can still maintain an ethical attitude. This is about being open and transparent about the research interests as well as his/her intentions with regards to publications. Josselson (2012) talks about this as being "a matter of good methodology" (p.540)

A third consideration pertains to the protection of the participant from any harm as a result of the publication of the research. This involves considering procedures around anonymity and confidentiality but it also invokes the researcher to think about the relational responsibilities and how the participants are ultimately represented in the published texts. Josselson (2012) argues that the assurance of confidentiality and privacy is central to the very possibility of undertaking narrative research. She points out that unless the research participants trust that they can speak openly without being identified, they will not tell us their stories or relate their experiences. Again, many institutional ethics procedures put in place steps to maintain anonymity of the research participants. The narrative researcher needs to adhere to these provisions but can also take further steps to remove any potential indicators to protect those involved when it comes to publication or wider dissemination. Josselson (2012) argues that narrative researchers are “ethically bound to consider how publication of the material might affect the person’s identity in the community were their identity to be revealed” (p554). In this research, all names have been changed as well as the names of people mentioned in the interviews. Furthermore, I requested that the embargo period for publication on the university online thesis repository be extended from three to five years in the interests of protecting the participants’ privacy. These procedures are further explained in the next chapter.

Relating to the protection of the research participants in research publications, Clandinin and Connolly (2000) highlight an additional ethical concern for narrative research: “we need to be aware of the possibility that the landscape and the persons with whom we are engaging as participants may be shifting and changing. What once seemed settled and fixed is once again a shifting ground” (p.175). Clandinin and Connolly alert us here to the temporality and tentativeness of findings in narrative inquiry. Josselson (2012) mentions “the contingencies rampant in our work” and Sikes (2016) observes that not only do people change but our assessments of them change too.

The narrative researcher must be cognisant of this and must ensure to relate not only his/her findings and interpretations but to articulate the situatedness and temporality of these findings. Sikes (2016) argues that this is an important ethical consideration for the narrative researcher so that lives, attitudes, beliefs and values that are

presented are not seen as fixed or frozen. She notes that the way to address this is to ensure that we clearly state in what we write that the lives we talk about are our interpretations and that the lives and interpretations are continually evolving. Again, the ethical attitude as outlined by Josselson helps us to understand how to apply this in practice. Having an ethical attitude means taking account of the contingencies that abound in narrative research. It means never being smug about our ethics and it means that as researchers “we must interact with our participants humbly, trying to learn from them” (p.560). In addition, having an ethical attitude involves being cognisant of and transparent about our own role in the research process. This is discussed next.

3.9 Positionality and Reflexivity

Crotty (1998) advises researchers to be concerned with the actual process of research and calls upon them to lay the process out for the scrutiny of observers. Carr (2000) argues for a clear articulation of positionality and maintains that it should be considered “an essential ingredient” and “logical necessity” within research (p.439). In relation to narrative research more specifically, reflexivity is part and parcel of the research process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that “as narrative inquirers we work within a space not only with our participants but also with ourselves” (p.61). They advise narrative researchers to be aware of the possible tensions that exist between their own histories and the research that they undertake.

While I am mindful of the criticisms of researcher reflexivity and I seek to avoid the “excessive naval-gazing” (Pile and Thrift, 1995), I have come to see, in my research of narrative, that my voice and my history are part of the research process. Reflexivity does not need to be self-indulgent but can be a pragmatic device which can help the researcher to be mindful of research decisions including choice of methodology, data analysis and dissemination of findings. With this in mind, the next section is about my positionality. I discuss it so that readers of this research might make their own judgements about my partiality, my choices and my limitations.

“How can we know the dancer from the dance?” When writing my first paper (which discussed positionality) for this doctoral programme, I ended my assignment with this W.B. Yeats quotation from his poem “Among School Children”. In the poem, he reflects upon his mortality and upon the experiences in his life that shaped who was and accordingly what he wrote. The lines from the poem came to me out of the blue as I tried to get to grips with the concept of positionality. The quote elicited the understanding that I needed. It also revealed to me that while I had to grapple with positionality initially, on some level, I already understood it.

I am bringing up this quote from Yeats for a few reasons. First, I am including it because it conveys beautifully how we are inextricably linked to our history, our experiences and our stories. I am including it because it fits with my beliefs relating to the connectedness between researcher and research and therefore it clearly illustrates my own positionality in this research project. Finally, I am including it because I came across this Yeats quote again while reading up on narrative research for this dissertation (see Reissman, 2008) and I was struck by this synergy and serendipity. It provided affirmation that narrative inquiry sits well with me and that when I am involved in narrative research, I am in the right place.

When Clandinin and Connelly (2000) speak of the three-dimensional space in narrative inquiry they include the moving forward and backward in time and space for the researcher as well as the researched. Through others’ stories and experiences, memories re-surface. They have a lovely way of describing this: “what becomes clear to us is that as inquirers we meet ourselves in the past, the present, and the future” (p.60). Narrative accepts the inevitability of the presence of the researcher in the research process from the outset. It embraces what Tedlock (2005) describes as the *autobiographical impulse* where there is a connection between “the gaze outward” and “the gaze inward” (p.467).

The major focus of this research is to gain an understanding of academic writing and voice through the participants’ stories. A minor focus is my own academic development and the discovery of my own voice through academic writing. I am interested in understanding more about how people develop through writing because I believe it is an aspect of education that can be used to support the development of

opinion, self-awareness and the understanding of discourse. This has been my experience. I have tapped into my own convictions through academic writing. My research curiosity is related to whether this experience is shared by others and how this might be supported.

My interest in voice is also related to my wider interest in developing criticality in students. Considering the proliferation of media opinion and the ease of access to information, students need to be increasingly discerning. They need to be supported to develop their worldviews and opinions and I see higher education as an important vehicle for this. I acknowledge that this position is not everyone's. I recognise the pressures in higher education and the market drivers that bring about a greater emphasis on skills and employability where criticality is set as part of a set of graduate attributes. I acknowledge these factors but I choose not to accept them without questioning their veracity.

Chapter 4

Storying the Stories Collected

4.1 Introduction

My intention in this chapter is to highlight some key events in this project's own research story. This chapter therefore considers the research story and is essentially a behind-the-scenes account of the process and choices that have shaped this research. The chapter introduces the over-arching aims and research questions which initiated the research process and set its course. It describes the procedures of data gathering and data analysis and outlines the ethical considerations to give readers an understanding of how the research was undertaken.

I outline my research approach and decisions here to give my research credibility because I have engaged in a reflexive process. I also include them because I wish my representation of participants in the coming chapters to be judged by the reader. It is by reviewing the research story that readers may have a better sense of my presence in the research and how I have represented participants. Law (2004) outlines the need for us to acknowledge "that our methods also *craft* realities" (p.153). Riessman (2008) calls it "storying the stories collected" (p.188).

4.2 Research Decisions

Wellington et al. (2005) speak of the "messy, developmental and sometimes intensely personal elements of research" (p.114). This project has been *messy* at times. It evolved over time and is not the project that was loosely envisaged when I set out drafting my research proposal. For example, in my research proposal I explored using phenomenology as my methodological approach but in the early stages of planning became more interested in narrative and changed course. Another key change in this research involved a widening of focus and a change of dissertation title. The first title I submitted for this thesis was: *On finding voice: Perspectives on the discovery and development of voice in academic writing*. This title comes from

the beginning of my research process and my initial idea that voice was associated with the development of opinion, self-expression and authority in writing. My literature research expanded my understanding to encompass a wider and more complex range of meanings for voice relating to socio-cultural influences as well as issues of power and agency, for example. I widened the focus of the research therefore to capture the broader connotations of voice and to allow for the possibilities for voice that the research participants might bring to the research. The new title and wider focus of the research therefore accommodated my developed understanding of voice and made the space for a multiplicity of participant responses. The focus also evolved as my thoughts on the methodology and research analysis evolved too. I began to see that as well as honing in on the participants' stories, I also wanted to discuss their perspectives on voice and writing. The broadened research focus helped shape my research aims and objectives which are outlined in the next section.

4.3 Research Focus: The Aims and the Questions

The overall aims for this research are:

- (1) To explore the stories and experiences relating to academic writing and voice and to consider how these stories relate to their context;
- (2) To explore the perspectives and meanings of voice in academic writing across different stages of academic study and development.

These aims can also be considered in terms of two pathways which guide the research process and provide the cornerstones for the research analysis. These pathways are *Exploring Stories* and *Exploring Concepts*. The stories are explored with the intention of providing a depth of understanding about writing and voice generating detailed accounts that go beyond general statements (Reissman, 2008). Narratives contribute to research not only by describing events but also by telling us how they unfold and how people felt. Gibbs (2007) explains: “narratives thus allow

us to share the meaning of their experiences for respondents and to give them a voice so that we may come to understand how they experience life” (p.71). This pathway in the research and the choice of narrative approach has shaped the research interviews and the approach to data analysis and interpretation. The interview questions were designed to elicit reflection and recall of events that related to their learning and writing in higher education. The choice of narrative enhances the opportunity to hear participants’ voices as I provide extended transcripts of their recollections. The first part of the data analysis for this project therefore became a quest for stories as I trawled through all interview transcripts to isolate the participants’ stories. The section entitled *Exploring Stories* in the next chapter presents some of these stories where it was possible to follow participants *down their trails* (Reissman, 2008) and to enter into the narrator’s perspective as he or she remembers an event related to their academic writing.

The concepts of voice are explored in the second pathway which aims to focus in on perspectives and meanings of voice. This pathway relates to the second research aim and involves a focussed exploration of individuals’ perceptions of what voice means. Each interview contained questions specifically about voice and, in the data analysis, this entailed a detailed search across all transcripts for references to voice and the categorisation of participants’ understanding of the concept. In relation to research design, this pathway also shaped the choice of participants as I sought to explore whether these perspectives remained the same or evolved across the different stages of learning in university. These research aims framed the research questions which are as follows:

Exploring Stories:

1: What are the experiences of the participants in relation to academic writing?

This question invited participants’ stories about their experiences of writing in university across all stages. They were asked to describe their experiences of academic writing including what they enjoy and what they find challenging. They were asked whether they could recall particular events or people that had an impact on their learning and their academic writing.

2: What are the experiences of the participants in relation to their voice through their academic writing?

This question asked participants to consider their own voice and what that means to them personally. They were asked whether it feels evident in their writing, whether it has changed as they have progressed in education, whether it feels part of their academic writing at all. This question was asked in general terms but also in relation to the sample writing that was provided by participants so they could talk about the process of writing it.

Exploring Concepts:

3: What is voice in academic writing?

This question examined the various conceptions of voice in the research that exists within academic writing. The review of existing literature inevitably formed an important backdrop to this question but, in addition, the research participants were asked for their perspectives on what voice means and how it plays a part in academic writing generally. In addition, a more focussed question relating to their own writing was asked to help understand participants' perspectives on voice. Using a sample of their own academic writing, the participants were asked to discuss what voice means in their own work and how their voice was represented.

4: What contextual influences are present in the research and appear to have a bearing on academic writing and perspectives on voice?

This question sought to frame the research specifically within its context and sought to assess some of the predominant discourses surrounding academic writing. Questions were asked about the positioning of academic writing in their immediate academic environment and on the assumptions and expectations relating to academic writing as perceived by them.

These research questions provided the framework which then enabled the exploration of the research aims in this project. They steered the development of the

interview questions (see Appendix 1) and the focus of my inquiry in the interviews. The research questions also guided me in the analysis of the data subsequently.

4.4 Research Data: Interviews and Artefacts

4.4.1 The Pilot Interviews

I conducted two pilot interviews to practise my interviewing approach. The pilot interviews were a worthwhile undertaking and they helped me to reflect on my questions and my role as interviewer. In addition, I evaluated the supporting resources such as the research information document and the voice wordle (see section below for explanation). For example, after the first pilot interview, where I tried out the voice wordle, I recorded the following in my notes: “The voice wordle works and I think it is necessary. The concepts of voice are too abstract and there are too many layers to expect someone to discuss it from nothing”. I have included an abridged version of my pilot field notes in Appendix 2. I have removed any information relating to participants because they did not sign up to be part of the interview process. However, I have included some of the learning points and observations which influenced my interview approach and therefore form part of the research story. What I learned in the two pilot interviews was indicative of what I learned subsequently in the eleven interviews which was that each interview was completely unique. In some cases people showed a preference for answering questions concisely and the stories were slower to emerge. In other cases, people showed a natural inclination towards storytelling and, with the carte blanche to let go, remarkable stories emerged.

I noted some of the participants’ observations from my first pilot interview because they struck me as significant and because they brought to life some of the literature that I had read on narrative research. One pilot participant, in her reflections on the interview, told me that she found the interview helpful making connections. She commented that she was thinking things she had never thought before. These observations brought home to me the potential impact of narrative and helped me to

better understand the references to *meaning-making* in the literature and to feel what Clandinin and Connolly (2000) refer to as “experiencing the experience” (p.80).

4.4.2 The Selection of Research Participants

The research participants were selected from the Quinn School of Business (undergraduate) and the Smurfit School of Business (postgraduate) which form part of the UCD College of Business and Law. Information on the UCD College of Business and Law is provided in the Appendix 3.

The choice to conduct research in one college within a university rather than selecting a number of college or schools across the university was deliberate. It relates directly to my aim to maintain focus upon the different stages of the academic career and to get a close-up view of voice. My concern was that by selecting different faculties, it would necessitate discussion on the different disciplinary discourses and academic writing practices that exist within a university and, while there is undoubtedly research potential here, it was not within the scope of this project and would have distracted from my primary aims.

A second consideration related to the selection of participants within the College of Business and Law and this was influenced by the methodological approach as well as the research objectives. Narrative interviews elicit dense and detailed data with an emphasis on depth rather than breadth. This means a limitation, within the confines of this time-bound study, on the number of participants that can be interviewed within the timescale of the project. In addition to this, one of the research objectives of this project was to the intention to look peoples’ writing experiences across the academic journey. This meant that rather than interviewing participants at a particular stage in higher education (for example undergraduates), I was seeking to include a range of participants at different stages of academic study or career and with different levels of writing experience. I opted for the selection of research participants (see Table 2 below) below with the intention that it would provide a sense of the academic journey, that it might highlight similarities or differences at different stages of study and finally, that it would be manageable in the bounds of this study.

- 2 Undergraduate students (second year students)
- 2 MA students
- 1 PhD student
- 2 Postdoctoral researchers
- 4 Academic staff members (comprising 1 new academic staff member, 2 experienced academics at lecturer level and 1 professor)

Table 2 Interview Participants

4.4.3 The Interviews

The interviews were conducted between June 2015 and the end of October 2015 in the Quinn School of Business either in a small meeting room or in the offices of academic staff. May (1997) talks about how “interviews can yield rich insights into people’s experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings” (p.109). In narrative research, it is exactly this richness of insight that is sought through participants’ accounts of their experiences. For Reissman (2008), the goal of narrative interviewing is to elicit detailed accounts of experience rather than short replies to questions and to create an interview space with an equal and conversational relationship between interviewer and interviewee. It is a conversation, as conceived by Mishler (1986), which enables meaningful speech and situates the interviewer and interviewee as speakers of “a shared language” (p.11).

Interviews for Riessman (2008) are *narrative occasions*. She sees the interview as an opportunity where the researcher and research participants “jointly construct narrative and meaning” (p.23). My preparation for the interviews involved the drawing up of a range of indicative interview questions (see Appendix 1) which were designed to elicit detailed answers about writing, university experience and voice. The idea of setting out a list of questions seemed to go against the idea of a natural conversational interview but, I was also aware that I was stepping into an unknown

and needed to develop my thinking to prepare for the interviews and to clarify my understanding of what I needed to do as interviewer.

Thankfully my preparation remained just preparation and it was constructive if a little formulaic. During the interviews, because I felt prepared, I was able to let go and allow the interviews take their own conversational and narrative turns. What I discovered was that the narrative interview can feel natural, interesting and liberating. The ease of discussion and the emergence of stories evolved naturally over the course of the interviews. Some interviews were more story-rich than others and my sense is that this is due partly to a more pronounced proclivity for storytelling in some participants and also down to my own developing interview skills and confidence as the interviews progressed. Listening back to the audio recordings of interviews and reading the transcripts, I encountered missed opportunities or instances where I jumped into the conversation rather than leaving the participants in a temporary silence. However, I could also see and hear the unfolding of insightful stories which may not have emerged using a different approach. These stories were constructed because of the questions I asked and because of the generosity of participants in sharing their recollections. Riessman (2008) writes that “narratives invite us as listeners, readers and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator” (p.9). This sums up the impact and privilege of narrative interviewing.

4.4.4 The Sample of Writing

When drafting the research proposal for this dissertation, I came up with the idea of asking participants for a sample of writing. Initially, the idea was that it would provide an opportunity to examine instances of voice in the participants’ writing. However, as I became clearer on the focus of my research I became more reticent to go down a route involving extensive linguistic analysis and I saw the purpose of the sample writing primarily as an aid to the interview process itself. Considering narrative’s emphasis on a more conversational interview and co-construction of meaning, I felt that the idea of in-depth analysis of the writing in the absence of participants with my own set of questions no longer felt appropriate. The relevance

of exploring actual writing in a study about writing prevailed however. I decided to use the sample of writing at the interview only as part of the conversation where it seemed appropriate to do so without extensive pre-planning of questions.

Each research participant was asked to provide a sample of their academic writing. This was clearly stated as optional as I was mindful that some participants might not be comfortable with this aspect of the research. In the end, participants were willing to provide a sample of their writing and eager to discuss it. Nine of the eleven participants provided their writing and the instances where it was not provided was more likely due to an oversight rather than reticence. The sample of writing took different forms. For students, this was an essay that they submitted for continuous assessment. For academic staff, it was a paper or chapter that they were working on, had completed or sought to be published.

The samples of writing gave me a chance to connect with the participants in the interview and also provided a valuable opportunity to discuss writing and voice in a more tangible and focussed way. During the interviews, I asked participants to tell me the story of how the particular paper had come about and to describe the process of researching and writing it. In a number of interviews this question prompted a story from participants that I believe would not otherwise have come to the fore with more general questions about writing. In some interviews, the discussion on voice in relation to their own paper, energised the participants and opened up the discussion—again in a way that might not otherwise have occurred.

4.4.5 The Voice Wordle

As I had widened my own interpretation of what voice can signify over the course of my research, I had to consider how I could explore the different possibilities for voice within the interviews. I felt there was a need to introduce something more tangible in the interviews to help explore voice. My concern was that relying upon an abstract conversation might yield very little on its own. The voice wordle became an important tool in the interviews and was developed as a way to introduce some of the different meanings of voice to participants in the interviews. Taking a selection

of the meanings for voice that I encountered in the literature, I used free software to develop the voice wordle as a visual aid. The objective here was purely to stimulate conversation with the participants. There are no weightings associated with the words depicted and their size and font are randomly configured and this was explained at each interview.

During the interviews, I asked participants about their interpretation of voice before introducing the voice wordle into conversation and then included it to continue the conversation about voice in a more focussed way. The voice wordle was successful in stimulating participants' interest in voice as well as their comments on what was relevant to them. It worked far better than I had anticipated and played a significant role in the research process by adding a greater depth and vibrancy to the conversations about voice.

Table 3 Voice Wordle



4.4.6 The Field Notes

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend that field texts be kept by the narrative inquirer and observe the duality of narrative research which encompasses an external space – “the watching outward” and an internal or personal space – “the turning inward” (p.86). I decided to produce field notes as part of the research process and resolved to take notes after each interview to summarise my impressions, thoughts and ideas. The approach was along the lines of freewriting – not overly constructed or neat but a loose record of momentary impressions that could serve as an *interpretive record* (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and could potentially contribute to both the analysis of data and the presentation of findings.

I completed field notes after all interviews. Sometimes these notes were written on a bus or train as I travelled home after interviews so the notes are not neat or tidy. I include some of my observations here because they help to tell the research story. The excerpts below have been selected because they speak of the research process and not of the individual participants as I am mindful of not compromising participants’ identities as a result of their inclusion. I have therefore selected more general comments and have changed the personal pronoun to *they* in place of the *he* or *she* that was used in the original notes.

My field notes record my own reflections as interviewer (the internal space) and reflect upon the interview itself or the participant’s story (the external space). They record some of the highs and lows of interviewing and show a process of learning throughout the research process. The following excerpts describe situations that do not go so smoothly as well as those where I am more positive and confident:

Not easy at first. First answers quite clipped and certainly not feeling that stories would come. I think they wanted to maintain distance, steer away from personal.

Despite tricky start, I kept going. My instincts telling me to keep talking about writing, to move out of personal and onto university writing.

It was a great interview. They were open, interested, engaged and engaging. I think they will have some interesting things on the audio. I feel really positive after the interview and feel that they got something from it.

The field notes also record reflections on important findings or observations that are part of the analysis of data while still in the field. This is where they perhaps have most value in this research as they record the sparks of ideas:

I hardly look at the question sheet and enter into a conversation about writing and voice as a shared interest. They are open, really open about their challenges and vulnerabilities – again I realise that conversations about voice and writing can lead into discussions of importance for people. It's emotive and insightful. These discussions serve a purpose – not just for me but for individuals as they consider and reflect upon their writing history, their influences and their stories. I am not sure if this thesis will do it justice but I think there is something here to be explored.

One important outcome from writing the field notes comes from an idea to record my impression of each participant's sense of voice or voice meaning after each interview. I had no plan for this originally but instinctively jotted down my initial thoughts in the first two interviews and then decided to create a list under the heading "Meanings of Voice for Participants". This list is discussed in the second findings chapter and has become an insightful part of the research adding an unexpected dimension to the research data as well as providing new ways of considering voice.

4.5 Research Analysis

Riessman (2008) writing about narrative analysis advises that researchers must document their sources and bring the reader along with them as they uncover a trail of evidence and critically evaluate it. This section sets out the trail and essentially my approach to uncovering the stories, analysing the content of the interviews and meaning-making from the data. The steps below highlight a number of processes that I undertook as part of the research analysis and therefore form part of the co-construction of meaning in this research.

Certain decisions shaped the analysis process and therefore influenced the shape of the research findings. The first decision was to look at all interviews on a case by case basis and to begin the research analysis with an open mind. Riessman (2008) is very clear about the importance of theorising from the case rather than from component themes. She argues: “Honoring individual agency and intention is difficult when cases are pooled to make general statements” (p.12). In this research, I chose to develop theme categories inductively rather than deductively. My starting point therefore was the transcripts and the stories and exploring the recurring themes and ideas from there.

The second decision was to adopt thematic narrative analysis. In this approach, “content is the exclusive focus” (Riessman 2008, p.53) which means that I do not delve into the structure of the narrative nor do I explore how the narrative is told. My focus is purely on the stories and discussions in the interview which recount the participants’ experiences and perspectives. It is from these stories and discussions that the themes presented in the first findings chapter emerged.

The third important decision evolved as I became familiar with the data and had to consider how I would work with it and how I could usefully represent the participants and their stories within the bounds of the study. The research aims and the pathways of *Exploring Stories* and *Exploring Concepts* became the underpinning for the research analysis as I decided to segment the analysis along the lines of story and concept. The findings therefore have one part dedicated to participant stories and the other focussing on the concepts or meanings of voice.

4.5.1 Interview Transcripts

All interviews were recorded with participants’ consent and fully transcribed. I undertook the transcription for the first four interviews but outsourced this to a transcription specialist for the remaining seven interviews. The individual transcripts were emailed to all participants for their comments and verification at the end of the data gathering stage. Participants were advised that the transcript was being sent for their information and comment if they wished to do so. I further reminded

participants that any identifying information would be removed from the transcripts where they were being used in the dissertation so that anonymity would be maintained. A number of participants replied and indicated that they were happy with the record. Some participants that I met in the building commented that they were really pleased to receive the transcripts and found it interesting to reflect back on the process again. Two people added that they had found it really beneficial.

Decisions about how to represent the interview texts in the final publication are, according to Riessman (2008), more than just technical decisions. My choice was to leave the transcripts as the records they are where possible but to make minimal adjustments where necessary when presenting in the next chapter. Plummer (2001) acknowledges that some editing and some tidying up of text are necessary. The balance comes by “staying close to the original voices, words and texture” (p.176). For the excerpts used, minimal changes have been made to the original transcript. For example, some superfluous non-verbal utterances have been removed as have affirmations such as OK, OK etc. that break up the flow of the story. In a number of long excerpts or where there is deviation from a story line, I have included (...) to signify where some text has been deleted. In some parts of the text where there were names used or distinctive references to role, these have been omitted or signified by *** to honour confidentiality. In some of the narratives following, I include my questions to aid the understanding of the piece whereas others flow independently without need for my presence. Word count was a consideration so in some instances so I had to cut down text where I saw repetition and have tried to do this sensitively so that it would not alter the meaning or feel of the excerpt. Some excerpts that I include are lengthy and I wavered about cutting them down. In the end, I felt the inclusion of the text was justified so that the full story could be heard.

4.6 Thematic Analysis

4.6.1 Exploring Stories: Curating Narratives

“The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives.”

(Connelly and Clandinin 1990, p.2)

This part of the research analysis links to the research questions that seek to explore the story and experiences of participants in relation to academic writing and voice. This is the first part of the analysis in this research where I reviewed all the transcripts of the interviews and went about highlighting and collecting the stories that I found. I created new files for all the stories organised by participant and then reviewed all the stories a number of times to get a sense of not only the individual stories but also the wider or bigger stories that they were able to tell. In this first phase of collecting, I identified twenty-four stories.

I realised that it would not be possible to discuss all the stories that emerged in the research and that my role as researcher had also become not only collector but also curator. The second stage therefore involved selecting. This process involved sifting and sorting and considering criteria for selecting the stories that I would analyse in the research. In the end, I cut down to sixteen narratives which are included in the next chapter. My primary focus was to select to present narratives that were concerned with academic writing and voice. Other stories about learning and education or more personal accounts were not included. I tried to include stories that were not only interesting on an individual level but which were insightful and told a bigger story. These were stories that spoke of some of the wider debates or questions in contemporary higher education - the little stories with a big story to tell. I also tried to include a variety of stories and to select stories from different stages of the academic path. This was to give a sense of the different perspectives and challenges across the academic trajectory.

The fourth consideration related to the presentation of the narratives and the inclusion of my voice alongside those of the participants. Plummer (2001) devised a

continuum of construction of narratives (see below) which situates different approaches to presenting narratives and the varying degrees of editing, interpretation and analysis involved. The continuum is useful in situating my approach to thematic analysis and presentation of the narratives in the next chapter. The continuum locates at one end narratives that are “uncontaminated” and stand alone with no commentary or researcher intrusion. At the other end, the continuum identifies instances where researchers develop their account with little reference to the researched. My approach is situated mid-continuum. It is the point at which Plummer states is “when the subjects are allowed to speak for themselves but where their voices get organized around themes (with the subject’s account usually linked to sociological theory” (p.180). This felt like the correct pathway for this research. While the narratives themselves have plenty to say and could have been left “uncontaminated”, my approach was to add a commentary for each, to contextualise them and finally, to situate them within wider debates in higher education.

A Continuum of Construction				
I	II	III	IV	V
The subject’s pure construction (raw) e.g. original diaries, unsolicited letters, autobiographies, self-written books, sociologist’s own personal experience	Edited personal documents	Systematic thematic analysis	Verification by anecdote (exemplifying)	The sociologist’s ‘pure construction’ e.g. sociological theories

Table 4 Plummer (2001) Continuum of Construction of Narratives (p.141)

4.6.2 Exploring Concepts: Word Analysis

As well as exploring the stories within the interview transcripts, I was also interested in exploring the concepts relating to voice. My approach to this part of the analysis

was to adopt an open coding approach. This approach, as noted by Gibbs (2007) is where the transcripts are read reflectively to highlight any categories or themes emerging. The process adopted was to read and re-read the transcripts and to add notes and thematic ideas in the margins. Further analysis involved the identification of predominant themes and generating a title for these.

In addition to reading the interview transcripts, I also adopted a word analysis approach as a way of focussing specifically on the participants' understanding of voice. Gibbs (2007) advises to "pick out one word or phrase that seems significant, then list all its possible meanings. Examine the text to see which apply here. You may find new meanings that were not obvious beforehand" (p.50). In this respect, this part of the analysis process became almost like an extension of the literature review chapter because it involved again a focussed examination of the metaphors and meanings associated with voice. On this occasion, however, it was purely from the perspectives of the participants.

This component of the research analysis provided a vast amount of data and emerged as a key aspect of this dissertation's contribution. The analysis added insights to existing meanings and metaphors of voice and now provides a way to understand theoretical concepts through peoples' lived experiences. Additionally, the analysis generated some new meanings for voice not previously encountered in the literature and in this way contributes to our understanding of voice. These meanings for voice are presented in Chapter Six.

4.7 Ethical Considerations and Ethics Procedures

Like Sieber (1993), I believe that there is a moral obligation to ensure that the dignity and wellbeing of participants of any research process are protected. This is a consideration at all parts of the research process from the planning stage through to publication and, as researchers, I believe that we have to be mindful of sensitivities that might arise during the process as well as our obligations to the researched. For a doctoral thesis, there are official ethical criteria which need to be met as part of the process (discussed below) but I think it is also part of the learning for the researcher

to reflect on his or her own moral compass and how this relates to the project too. Josselson (2012) discusses the importance of adopting an *ethical attitude* in narrative research. By this she means “a stance that involves thinking through these matters and deciding how best to honor and protect those who participate in one’s studies while maintaining standards for responsible scholarship” (p.537). Narrative research therefore requires the researcher to consider the representation and protection of the research participants. Adopting an ethical attitude means being mindful of the respectful depiction and protection of participants throughout the project and beyond in future publications.

Questions arise for the researcher to consider personally in terms of priority and choosing right over wrong. For example, I had to ‘let go’ of a couple of participants during the interview phase of this project when they simply lost interest in attending a scheduled interview. It was important to live up to the statement that I made to potential participants about their participation being “entirely voluntary at all stages of the process” (as stated on information sheet) without making them feel awkward and I hope I managed this despite my initial knee-jerk reaction which was to convince them to stay. Similarly, there are questions for the researcher to consider within the specific context of the research project and nature of inquiry. In my case, while my topic of research was not particularly of a sensitive nature, I did have to consider that personal or emotive stories or discussions might arise through the stories – and they did. From the first pilot interview, I saw what can arise when people reflect about their university journey. There are highs and lows and there are potentially painful memories which must be allowed to surface and be greeted in the interview process.

As outlined in the previous chapter, narrative representation carries particular ethical obligations. Sikes (2016) highlighting the dilemmas, emphasises the need to be mindful of protecting the research participants throughout the research and of depicting those involved respectfully. She furthermore calls for the awareness in researcher to his/her responsibility to “avoid ‘violent’ textual practices which shape and tame the lives that we use as ‘data’ in order to present and privilege a version that serves our purposes” (p.411) and to be cautious about the potential for misuse of both “interpretational and authorial power” (p.411).

For me, moral obligation in research is based on the two tenets of respect and protection. Respect is determined by my own moral compass where I deem each individual to be worthy of honesty, kindness and polite treatment. My own moral code is grounded in the simple principle of treating others as you would like to be treated. While I acknowledge that I cannot assume that what I feel is good treatment will naturally apply to others, I do believe that I can use this credo as a way of checking my approach in the research process by trying to put myself in the shoes of the participants. For this project, being respectful translated into making sure that all participants were comfortable with the interview process, that they understood what the purpose of the research was and that they took part without feeling any obligation to do so. The interviews were conducted in an amiable manner and were relaxed and friendly. A number of participants commented that they had really enjoyed their interview so this reassured me that overall the interview was a positive experience for the participants as well as for me.

Protection was really about protecting each participant's right to confidentiality but it also involved thinking about how I represented them in the final thesis. In relation to confidentiality, I was working in the college where the research was conducted so I had to ensure not to discuss the interviews with anyone. In the thesis, I anonymised the narratives and, where necessary, cut out any identifying text so that I have taken all the measures at my disposal to help ensure confidentiality. With respect to representation, I wanted to give participants the opportunity to comment on the interview process and sent them their full interview transcripts for their comments when they had been transcribed. Only one participant came back with revisions which related to taking out identifying information. The others (that replied) commented that they were happy with the transcript and had found it an interesting read. In addition to this, I also had to consider how I represented the participants in the writing up and editing phase of the thesis. My way to do this, which fell in line with narrative practice anyway, was to include sizable excerpts from the interviews where the participants' voices could be heard. I also had to ensure that my voice would be discernible throughout the thesis too - giving readers the opportunity to distinguish the words of the participants from my commentary and conclusions.

Beyond my own ethical considerations, the project was governed by ethics procedures which enabled me to check my assumptions and approach and to consider steps in the process that I might otherwise have overlooked. I first underwent an ethics review in the University of Sheffield where my research proposal, methodology and research procedures were scrutinised and approved by an ethics committee (see Appendix 4 for approval letter). Following this, I applied for ethical approval in UCD. On the basis that the research proposal had already been approved by another university and on the basis that there was no substantial risk to participants, I was able to go through an ethical exemption process. This approval was received (with endorsement from the Head of School) in December 2014 (see Appendices 5 and 6). In line with ethics procedures, I provided all participants with information about the research process and an Informed Consent form (see Appendix 7 and Appendix 8). This meant that I commenced my interaction with participants (by email and in person) by communicating the purpose, aims and scope of the research and ensuring that they felt fully informed about their participation. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the purpose and scope of the research, asked participants if they had questions and checked if they were happy to proceed. All participants affirmed that they were happy to participate and the interviews began.

Chapter 5

Exploring Story: The Narratives

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents sixteen narratives that were collected and selected during the research analysis phase. These narratives were selected because they have something to say about academic writing and voice. They are presented completely in the participants' words and while I have undertaken minor editing (see previous chapter for explanation), I have endeavoured to maintain the integrity of the text and to minimise the tidying. My intention was to create the space for the voices of the interview participants in this chapter (see Appendix 9 for pen picture of participants). The outcome of this, I believe, is a valuable opportunity to gain insights into the experiences and perspectives of students and academic staff in a higher education institution. These voices and stories would not have been heard in this way without this research project and were it not for the questions that I asked, some of the issues raised here might not otherwise have been discussed. The narratives therefore have a particular value. The participants have so much to say and it is a privilege to share their experiences.

Alongside the participants' voices, there is of course my own voice in this chapter. The very selection of the narratives will speak of me and my perspectives. I have also chosen to add a commentary to each narrative. This commentary works on a practical level by helping to contextualise the narratives and to guide the reader throughout the chapter. In addition, the commentary provides my interpretation of the participants' narratives and pinpoints the questions that their accounts raise for me. I recognise that there is a fine line here. In relation to the presentation of narratives and writing up documentary research, Plummer (2001) raises the question: "Whose story is it now?" when the researcher and the participants' voices intertwine as they will in this chapter. He adds: "but when you have so modified it surely in part, it has become yours?" (p.177). In this chapter, I have decided to frame each narrative with my interpretation and so the narratives have become, in part, my story too. Ultimately this chapter will reveal my views as well as my strengths and my

limitations as a researcher. My intention, in taking this approach, is not to detract from the narratives nor indeed overpower the participants' voices with my own. The commentaries unify the narratives thematically and make explicit the bigger questions that the individual narratives raised in my mind. This adds further value to the narratives as it raises relevant questions that the reader, in turn, may wish to consider.

As previously discussed, my starting point for the data analysis was the collection of the narratives. While thematic analysis was a deliberate methodological decision, I had not developed any themes in advance of reading or selecting the narratives. The process of developing the themes therefore was inductive and was gradually fine-tuned as I went along. Themes were amalgamated where there was crossover to create broader themes. For example, I identified a theme about fear in writing in a narrative and this ultimately became part of broader theme called *Voice Silencers* which describes a range of constraints which impact upon academic writing. Four themes are presented in this chapter. They form the organising structure for this chapter and link the narratives to each other and also to wider concepts or theories. Each theme forms a sub-section of this chapter and within each thematic sub-section, the chosen narratives are presented and discussed. The four themes are:

- Personal Voice and Identity: The Presence of the Writer in Academic Writing;
- Competing Voices, Supportive Voices;
- Tentative Voices, Confident Voices;
- Voice Silencers: Personal and Institutional Constraints on Academic Writing.

5.2 Personal Voice and Identity: The Presence of the Writer in Academic Writing

By way of introduction to the narratives I have selected a narrative of my own. I didn't remember speaking like this in the interview and so it was a surprise to find that I had a story within the interview transcripts. From a methodological point of

view, it serves as a reminder of the unanticipated findings that come to the fore in the research analysis phase. The story is noteworthy also from a narrative research point of view as it demonstrates a jointly constructed narrative where both interviewer and participant create the storyline. Interestingly, in this case, there is a role reversal as the interviewer is recounting the story and the participant is commenting on it.

Within the context of this study, this narrative speaks of the importance that we can attach to moments in academic writing. While much of the focus of academic writing relates to external outcomes such as grading or publication in a good journal, the first story highlights the internal impact of feedback on academic writing. The feedback not only leads to changes in writing approach but it affects the person, the writer, too.

The subsequent narratives in this section continue to demonstrate, from different angles, the presence of the writer in academic writing. They highlight the presence of personal values, motivations and indeed struggles with managing objectivity and subjectivity in academic writing. My contention is that within academic writing, there is always a personal slant because there is always a writer and that academic writing, even when written with the intention of impartiality and distance, raises questions of identity. Through questions on voice, the stories in this section reveal academic writing to be an individual and personal endeavour even where it is not acknowledged and even where it is discouraged. Ivanic and Camps (2001) contend that there is no such thing as impersonal writing. I agree and believe that the narratives that follow exemplify this.

5.2.1 “It’s speaking to the writer.” (Narrative one)

I:⁴ *I remember my first assignment that I did for my, on my doctoral programme and it remains probably the best feedback-when I say best quality feedback-I’ve ever had, it was exactly that. It wasn’t a professor in the school, it was somebody else. They had outsourced it for some reason. Anyway, she was in Southampton, I think, and she said exactly that about the confidence. I saw it and I read back and I just, it blew my mind actually because I could see exactly what she was saying. It changed me and I just thought it’s rare that I’ve had feedback like that. It’s rare, like I can think of all the different things*

⁴ I: denotes Interviewer and P: denotes Participant

I've done since and even now nothing touches that page that she gave me. And I think it's rare and I think it's fantastic just to get that, when somebody says really honestly, talks to you about your confidence in terms of your writing style. It speaks to the writer even if you don't see yourself as a writer, it's speaking to the writer.

P: That's a great story. It's wonderful because that's that turning point. That's your epiphany moment.

In this passage, I discuss the impact of feedback on my writing at the beginning of my doctoral programme. This narrative strikes me not only as a story about writing confidence but it is as part of a story about developing my own writer identity. I take on board this idea of considering myself as a writer because of the feedback which addresses me *as a writer*. It therefore introduces a new aspect of my identity that I had not previously considered.

Fernsten and Reda (2011) contend that the teaching of academic writing should place emphasis on the development of the writer's identity and that it should be less about skills development and more about the writer assuming ownership for their writing and standpoint. This narrative demonstrates the impact of discussing writing from this perspective. It demonstrates also (as do so many of the narratives in this research) that academic writing, often situated as a distanced and detached form of writing is in fact deeply personal. There is often a hidden struggle where the writer is working out who they are, what they think and how to construct their voice in their writing. This struggle is often not accounted for in the finished essay or article and the questions that the writer has, are asked in isolation. The feedback in this case is helpful in shifting perspective but it is worth considering that maybe there is further opportunity to develop this type of conversation about writing and voice within the classroom too.

In the next narrative, the theme of the personal in academic writing continues but in a different vein. The second narrative shows the deeply personal aspects of academic writing which have shaped and influenced the participant's research interest and his motivation to write.

5.2.2 “I wanted to make my voice heard” (Narrative two)

This narrative comes from a discussion with Sean, a postdoctoral researcher employed in the Quinn School of Business. His interview was rich with narratives and he recounted a number of personal stories relating to his writing and his education. This narrative charts a personal moment in his life where he connects his personal history to his academic career. There is nothing arbitrary about his choice of research topic nor his predilection for critical theory as his chosen methodology. From a young age, he felt he had something to say and wanted to make his voice heard. The interview takes place (coincidentally) on the day that his first article has been published. The conversation in the excerpt below begins with our conversation about this article.

P: So I mean...for me, this is a combination of I don't know...maybe... ten more than ten, fifteen years of reflecting critically about how society and how social structures impact on your health. So it's quite personal like I can even remember this specific moment in my life, where I said, actually, even without fully realising it, that I wanted to go into this area so.... My Dad was quite unwell for some time and he was in Beaumont Hospital and you could see the impact which inequality was having in terms of the lives and the health of people in the hospital. Even though I was only 16 or 17 at the time and I got a very palpable sense of that even at that early stage of my life and I was reading, I think it was a Fintan O'Toole book at the time. It was called 'After the Ball', and he had a section on the state of health in Ireland and he wrote a lot about inequality and about the disparities in health between rich and poor and that very much resonated with me and then I took that then into undergraduate level and it pretty much kind of, it shaped my vision, my academic vision right throughout the undergrad, to the Master's, to the PhD. Even though I wasn't a very good writer at all! I would have been, I would say probably the bottom of the scrap heap in terms of that like. It took a long time for me to improve and get better at it but it was something that I was very much passionate about. So I guess when I reached the Master's level then I was very conscious that this was something that I wanted to do and I wanted to make my voice heard in that area I guess. Yeah, absolutely. And then diabetes as an area where for me there's massive inequality there that there that it's just completely ignored that it is two or three times more prevalent in the lower income groups compared to the higher income groups and it's not spoken about. There is just complete silence around that issue and if it is spoken about... it's just presumed because the poor...they're lazy, they lack willpower, they won't get up off their arse and do something about it. It's the same discourses happening again and again and again and it seemed that this was completely unchallenged in the area of diabetes and obesity in general. So what I really was applying was what CR Mills described as a 'Sociological Imagination' so it's trying to change peoples'

interpretation of seemingly private issues and reframing them as public or political issues.

The idea of voice here is picked up as a metaphor for action and speaking out against social injustice. Sean has a moment of realisation that influences his choice of study and career and he has not wavered from it. His interpretation of having something to say resonates with Freire's *conscientisation* - a moment in time when the consciousness is raised and stimulates action. This voice is critical and action-oriented and the action in this case is questioning, researching and writing about the treatment of diabetes. Ivanic (1998) sees writing as an act of identity and this narrative reveals the personal interests, beliefs and motivation of the participant. What emerges later in the conversation is that Sean also has Type 1 Diabetes. His choice of topic is deeply personal and is an extension of who he is.

5.2.3 “I suppose it would come out in my writings” (Narrative three)

This narrative comes from a discussion with Ellen, a doctoral student who is working as a research assistant in the College of Business. She is close to finishing her thesis and is wrangling with her ideas about her objectivity and subjectivity in her thesis. She explains that the direction she has been given from her supervisor is to be objective and impartial in her writing but she struggles with this and wishes for her personal voice to be revealed in her work so that her dissertation can be contextualised and better understood.

P: I was doing my personal statement and I hadn't really done a personal statement before and I decided, I read somebody else's PhD which was quite nice and he had a really lovely personal statement at the beginning and it was all like I this and I said I think I'm going to try and adapt this because I had - part of my fieldwork was to go out into the courts and I found it really difficult emotionally because you are down in the children's court and you know it's kind of ...it's really harsh and I had never been exposed to that before and the first day I left I was sobbing walking up to the DART⁵ going 'Oh my God, I'm building a career off this.

(...) Conversation moves to Ellen's sample writing (an article on children in the justice system which has been published).

⁵ DART is Dublin's commuter train

P: ... when I was writing my methodology there not so long ago and it's part of what I'm saying in it is that, look you know, I go in and try to be as objective as I can but I am sitting there in a courtroom quite shocked by the experiences around me and you know what does that do to my - you know collection of data- what does that do to my writing then afterwards? There has to be elements that I am drawing in to that. I have a son who was playing the violin. I don't know if you know Amhrain school? It's this beautiful, it's like a Harry Potter kind of style school and he was off up playing his violin there and I was in court with a guy who looked about ten standing there who was a drug runner and a gun mule and his mother sobbing beside me and I was just sitting there going what right do I have to kind of... and my son up there playing his violin and it's very upsetting. And then of course you have the other side of it which was by the end of it, I wasn't even noticing anybody, I was just recording my data. So you know you have all of these emotions to deal with and I think they prevent you from being fully objective as a data collector but also when you are writing up. So my way of approaching that was to do the personal statement and to list all of that out and to say listen, this is what I experienced in the field...I tried to be as objective as possible. I didn't record my feelings towards anything. I recorded what happened and then I-you know- analysed it later as what happened but everything is always tainted by your feelings and emotions so...I suppose it would come out in my writings and that.

This narrative is included in detail because it casts a light on the internal struggles that are part of gathering and writing up data. Quite often these struggles are sanitised or edited out of a thesis but in this interview, they are a current and real preoccupation for the participant. Ellen realises that she is going against the grain but is resolute that the personal has to be part of her writing because she has felt these emotions as part of her research process. While she has not abandoned the idea of objectivity or objectively presenting findings, she sees the acknowledgement of her subjectivity as a way to achieve this rather than detract from it.

This narrative reveals a tension between more conventional forms of academic writing where the writer is encouraged to be objective and distanced from the writing and critical approaches where identity is strongly featured. Ivanic and Simson (1992) observe that conventional academic writing is thought of as “being about ideas and facts rather than people” (p.151). In the College of Business and Law, more conventional approaches seem to be favoured but this interview (and others) reveal that many students are grappling with the direction to remain *outside* their writing. Rather than being a challenge to established modes of practice, this divergence of the viewpoints presents an opportunity for beneficial epistemological discussion.

Benesch (2001) talks about a demystification of learning whereby students feel empowered to discuss questions values, power relations and assumptions as part of the curriculum and to ask questions when they do not understand. She writes: “in this formulation, students are not novices, or outsiders, who must surrender to the language and practices of academic discourse communities; rather, they are active members of the academy whose rights should be considered” (p.133). Acknowledging that this research has not included a review of current practices in the College and cannot therefore generalise about teaching practices, this narrative suggests that there is scope for more attention to such inclusive conversations which could help students’ learning.

**5.2.4 “Whenever I’m writing something, I’m always thinking at the back of my head am I displaying something here that I don’t realise I’m displaying just through my choice of words or the tone or the way I’ve written it?”
(Narrative four)**

This narrative again places the person at the heart of academic writing and picks up the idea of self-representation in writing. In this excerpt, John, a final year undergraduate student from the Quinn School of Business discusses his understanding of voice and draws on some personal experiences to try and make sense of his personal and academic learning. John is a natural storyteller and falls seamlessly into narrative to answer questions. He also shows a strong interest in literature. At one point in the interview he recalls a passage that he read in the Introduction of *Alice in Wonderland* which he had read not long before the interview took place. I have included the excerpt from the book as a backdrop for the conversation below.

“In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and again in *Ulysses*, James Joyce makes great play of the inseparability of writer and work, of the fact that even a work of fiction is inescapably an exercise in self-disclosure... Carroll, writing for children, was in the realms of play. Consciously he allowed for an ambivalence in his project, but who can say how far reaching he would allow this to be, or how well he knew the self he might inadvertently be expressing.”

(Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, (1865/1992), p.19 Wordsworth Classics – Introduction by Michael Irwin.

P: Something I would have learned over the summer I read 'Alice in Wonderland' and what I found, 'Alice in Wonderland' is a very good book because it's so...

I: Layered?

P: Yes, layered. But the one thing at the start of the book was, actually before the book even started it was a different... It was explaining something interesting which was that writers cannot ever really separate their personalities from their work. The reason that was brought up in 'Alice in Wonderland' was because there was suspicion about the author. But another example that was given was James Joyce with 'Ulysses'. I haven't read 'Ulysses' yet but that was where basically I started learning about it. So if I was to look at it from that perspective I'd say voice is getting at that, the author's general opinion and personality comes through in his writing.

(...)

*P: The first thing I was thinking there was I wouldn't even say it's limited to a writing where people are revealing themselves or parts of themselves without intending. One of the things I remember was I went to an interview over the summer. It wasn't very serious, just looking to talk to some guys in a firm called *** and I started telling them about myself and he picked up through the words something very personal about me - not through me saying it directly - but a lot of the words I'd chosen revealed to him what, like it's the thing I wasn't telling him...So the thing about that was - I've been thinking about it ever since - along with 'Alice in Wonderland' obviously, that when you say things or when you talk, your personality and your self are going to be revealed in what you do and say regardless of whether you want it to or not...Yeah it can be quite... I don't know how I feel about that. In one way it's good because you're always true and genuine with whatever you do. You can always see through other people but it also has a thing, you can never really hide something either. Like if I didn't feel like... I'd say I'm not really particularly interested in GAA⁶, that's pretty big against Irish culture. I'm always aware when I meet new people and right, is it ever going to come up that I'm not interested in sports whatsoever? That tends to put a big block in between you and that guy.*

Through his reading and writing, John is considering aspects of his own identity and self-representation and trying to work it out. Instinctively, he is touching on some of the ideas of Ivanic and Camps (2001) who argue that we convey impressions of

⁶ GAA is Gaelic Athletic Association which is the body running Gaelic football and hurling in Ireland

ourselves through our language both in conversation and in our writing. As John is working out who he is, he is aware at a deeper level that aspects of himself shine through, albeit unconsciously. He is engaging on a deeply personal level and while this is stimulated in reading outside his coursework (it has not been addressed in his studies), he is drawing on it as he considers his academic writing and how he is represented within it.

This narrative demonstrates the capacity that this student has for discussing his identity and self-representation in text but he has not had this opportunity at university. In much of this interview, John discusses his CV and forthcoming interviews as he prepares to leave university and start a career. It seems timely and appropriate perhaps to engage in discussions about self and aspirations as he moves into a new stage of life.

This narrative concludes the section in this chapter. Having to reflect on their writing and their voice in the interviews has helped the participants to articulate some of the questions they had about self-representation, identity and positionality. Ivanic (1998) argues that the improvement of teaching and learning about writing is a question for the entire academic community. These narratives show that the questions of identity are prevalent if not inevitable and yet they are not necessarily considered within the curriculum. The narratives show that both the curiosity and capacity to examine identity exist among students. Rather than students working through this in isolation, there is an opportunity to open out these discussions so that students can engage with key epistemological questions which will ultimately enhance their learning. Conversations about voice and academic writing present one pathway for this learning.

5.3 Competing Voices, Supportive Voices

I present the second theme as a binary because examples of both competing and supportive voices emerged in the data analysis. The narratives below demonstrate the plurality of voices that exist in one piece of writing. These are not merely the voices

of the authors but also the voices of supervisors helping the writing of an article or a doctoral thesis. This section shows an aspect writing that perhaps adds a different dimension to Bakhtin's *Heteroglossia*. It tells stories of supervisor influence on the final product of the writing efforts. It presents narratives of battles and narratives of support that exist behind the scenes of writing and which are not evident in the published dissertations or articles.

In the first narrative, we return to Ellen, the doctoral student who has been working on the personal statement and has to negotiate with her supervisor to include it. We then meet Anne, another early stage academic who describes feelings of guilt on the publication of her first article. The remaining two narratives of this section hone in on supportive voices. While the voice of the supervisor is undoubtedly present in the final work, the nature of their influence is described in very different terms.

5.3.1 “So it’s another big battle with the supervisor and we are still toing and froing on that” (Narrative five)

In the previous section, we encountered Ellen as she recounted her struggles with resolving her objectivity and subjectivity in her writing. This part of the interview captures a different struggle that was also part of her doctoral process. In her interview, while she praises the efforts and support of her supervisor, she also uses combative terms like “battles” and “arguments” to describe their relationship. The first narrative introduces the idea of competing voices behind the scenes in academic writing.

P: Yeah, well...I feel very kind of...I thought I would have more leeway in my PhD than I do... so I find that a lot of ideas and stuff that I would come up with, maybe they might be said to... well such and such has similar ideas so use those as your framework and I'm like 'but they're not exactly the same as my ideas and I really don't want to use their framework because it's missing one aspect of my idea or it has an additional one that I have to draw in just for it to fit that framework.' So I am constantly having those type of arguments with my supervisor so I find that a little bit... annoying. And I didn't think I would face that as much.

(...)

P: And all these type of emotions so I thought it would be really good to include these because it is ethnographic so it's another big battle with the supervisor and we are still toing and froing on that so you know it can be quite difficult to shift out of-when you've got a supervisor over you and you're in a hierarchical structure-that you have to conform to but at the same time you want to explore your own...kind of...

I: Voice?

P: Yeah put your own voice to it.

(...)

P: ... so I reported all of that to try and counteract maybe my lack of objectivity that might be seeping through because I do think it is important to be objective because you have to report on what's happening and not your how you are feeling towards it but at the same time if you think that you are being fully objective then you are missing something.

I: And how did your supervisor respond to that kind of approach?

P: I sent her a paper on...actually it's a woman who went totally overboard on her thing. It was a woman who had been sexually abused and all sorts of stuff how that fed in and I was like look I could be here (laughing) so no she's coming around to it. She's asked me to reduce the words and stuff like that so I have taken stuff out but I have stuck to my guns on some of it because I actually think it's important to put your work in context.

Ellen speaks of compromise and negotiation which undoubtedly form part of any research and writing process. Her frustration is evident and while she is good humoured about it, she also feels it necessary to fight her side and notes that she “stuck to her guns” to achieve what she wanted in her thesis. Over the course of the interviews, she also employs power infused language (“supervisor over you”, “conform” and “hierarchical structure” to describe her relationship. This narrative casts a light on the hidden struggles of academic writing collaboration. It also raises a question about how far should a supervisor go to shape and structure a student’s work and to influence a student’s voice. Who makes the call and who is in charge of the writing? Whose voice should be loudest? If we take a critical view of the supervisory relationship here, it leads us to questions about writer agency and the power dynamics in supervisory relationships.

When we look at a doctoral thesis as an outcome or product, it is judged on its content and structure and in many cases, the more experienced supervisor may well be placed to know best. However, when we look at the dissertation endeavour as a learning process where a student is developing expertise, authority and voice, it prompts us to question whether the voice of the author here is being compromised rather than enabled. The next narrative demonstrates the presence of competing voices in academic writing along similar lines and again demonstrates that when we consider voice, we can raise pertinent questions and challenge assumptions.

5.3.2 “I felt guilty as if it wasn’t my work” (Narrative six)

This interview is with Anne, a new academic staff member who is reflecting on her experiences of writing her first article for publication which is drawn from her doctoral thesis. It provides further insight into the nature of academic collaboration and raises questions again about how much influence is appropriate and whether the author’s voice should be quietened. It also raises questions about whether the achievement of a published article is rightly placed as the primary goal.

*P: Well, R** was my academic supervisor and G*** had a very peripheral involvement but I mean that paper is effectively the heart of the thesis and R*** was very keen that I get published before I finished the thesis and I mean it was a painful, painful exercise in writing that because I mean it went through so many drafts and I remember getting the first set of feedback from the journal, the reviewers and I just cried. I burst into tears. It was just...it felt like such a personal assault...Yeah, I mean it was... yeah I found it very difficult but I think the interesting journey for me in that paper was that feeling like I didn’t recognise myself in it once the paper had been published and the collaborative nature of it. Although I recognise, of course I recognise the material, it’s all my material but R*** tidied it up. I suppose because that it was his role and function at the time and I almost felt as though... I felt guilty as if it wasn’t my work. That was my feeling when it came out.*

What starts here as a story about an emotional response to feedback becomes something more layered. The individual story tells a bigger tale of the context in which academics publish and the pressure that can be experienced to be published in academic journals. The narrative is also about competing voices and it shows the significant influence of other voices that, perhaps in this case, overpower the voice of the author. Again, exploring voice provides a platform for asking salient, if

uncomfortable, questions. Is it too far a compromise if a person feels their work is hardly recognisable as their own? Should there be more space allowed in the early stages of academic writing for the development of the individual voice? Is the pressure or desire to publish taking precedence over learning and are the keystone developmental processes of higher education taking a more instrumental turn? This excerpt reminds me of the concept of *authentic voice* discussed in the literature. The participant is troubled here because it does not feel like her authentic voice. It felt almost like it wasn't her work or her words. Elbow (1998) speaks of authentic voice in terms of a connection to self and an individual consciousness. This has been displaced. The authentic voice as noted by Stewart (1972) as the authorial voice that is distinctive and personal and the sense of ownership of the piece has been lost. This narrative highlights the existence of multiple voices that inevitably form part of a piece of academic writing but it also captures perhaps where there is too great a concession on the part of the writer at an individual level.

Undoubtedly, the voice and presence of the supervisor can also be a very welcome and positive influence on academic work and on the student. The interviews also provided data of contrasting supportive voices where the supervisor guided the writing but did so in a way that did not overpower the emerging writer. The next two narratives demonstrate this. In the first excerpt, Ellen describes what she liked about the supervision of her Master's research. Following this, Alex, a postdoctoral researcher recounts his positive experience with his doctoral supervisor.

5.3.3 “He loved the idea of you getting lost in thought and kind of losing yourself in ideas.” (Narrative seven)

This narrative recalls a past experience with a supervisor which Ellen contrasts with her present arrangement. It is included by way of contrast and to show how the voice of the supervisor can be present - but in a different way.

P: He actually would be like ‘wow that’s really interesting what you were saying there.’ Now he would still get you to tidy it up and neaten it up and get it nice but he loved the idea of you getting lost in thought and kind of losing yourself in ideas when you were writing and he would pick stuff out that you would have enjoyed writing maybe and he would be like what, kind

of 'that's cool' you know, that type of attitude towards, you know that was really nice and it meant that when you were...he used to set quite a lot of assessments and stuff like that and you had to do work for him every week really so there was quite a lot of writing work to do but you didn't mind doing it because it was enjoyable writing and so yeah I think that kind of it made it enjoyable as opposed to a struggle where you are constantly asking yourself going: Am I writing this correctly? You were allowed to get kind of lost in thought a little bit which was quite nice.

In this excerpt, Ellen is almost nostalgic. She mentions getting lost in thought which is something that comes up regularly in her interview. She wants to be reflective and wants the space to find her way. There is a sense that the academic conventions (“Am I writing this correctly?”) are seen by her as constraining. They are imposing structure and regulation on her and thus impacting her enjoyment of the writing process. She is allowed space to explore but the supervisor would also get her to “neaten it up and get it nice”. The presence and guidance is felt but it is not overbearing. This comes across similarly in the next narrative.

5.3.4 “This guy didn’t want to change the core structure, he just made it better” (Narrative eight)

In this narrative, Alex describes the support he received in completing his doctoral thesis. Interestingly, this was his second supervisor. His first experience did not work out so, as with the previous narrative, he has the benefit of comparison.

P: So I changed the supervisor and then my second supervisor was brilliant. He got me through the PhD in one year after that. And he was the one who helped me with the writing...He was very good at the logic. He was very good at checking my logic, ‘you’re saying this but why are you saying this?’ I think he had a very philosophical mind as well. But when you’ve doing something yourself for so long you need somebody to really... it’s very difficult for you to be...so he basically made... my previous supervisor wanted to change a lot of things, maybe you should be looking at something completely different but this guy didn’t want to change the core structure, he just made it better. He made the style. (...) I mean he was like I like the ideas, I think they’re good. I think your analysis is good. I’m going to go through your articles and we’re going to make it better. And he was, don’t delete that, put that in there, that kind of thing. And he taught me that.

The pleasure is recounted above to contrast the previous more constraining experiences. While this narrative demonstrates a strong and influential supervisor

voice, we get the sense from Alex that it was not competing but rather enhancing. The tension and anxiety present in the earlier supervisory relationship is replaced with gratitude.

These narratives remind me of Bartholomae's (1986) contention that the development of voice takes time. I would add to this that the development of voice needs space. This is space not only to develop ideas and writing skills but also the space "to get lost in thoughts" and to find their way to a reasoned argument. The question asked by the supervisor in the narrative above ("Why are you saying this?") does not encumber the doctoral student but is an invitation to explore his stance. In this way, the learning and the voice in the writing becomes a process of "invention and discovery" (Bartholomae 1986, p.11).

What this section has shown is that delving into voice gives us a useful angle to scrutinise the student and supervisor relationship as well as the power dynamics that exist in higher education. It has cast a different light on the learning and writing processes of higher education and has prompted us to consider these processes from a different angle. Taking a voice lens to examine these supportive collaborations and the multiple voices that exist in an academic writing endeavour such as a thesis, we should ultimately look to ensure that the supervisory voices are complementary and enhancing, rather than competing. Perhaps there is scope also to privilege the process of learning over the achievement of output so that the student's voice is heard and not diminished.

5.4 Tentative Voices, Confident Voices

The third theme is presented again in binary form to denote the existence of the contrasting experiences that emerged in the research. It captures a number of sub-themes that emerged during the interviews which bear a resemblance to some of the metaphors and meanings for voice (such as opinion, authority, confidence and identity) that featured in the voice literature. Five narratives are included in this section. They tell a story that spans the academic spectrum as the narratives here relate experiences of students as well as academic staff members. These narratives

raise important questions about the academic career path as well as the expectations on students in higher education.

5.4.1 “Well anyone could have written that because there’s no personal feel to it, that there’s no attempt to kind of connect with the reader” (Narrative nine)

The first narrative charts the development of Enda, a second year student in the Quinn School of Business. This excerpt describes how he took time to review his essays in a bid to improve his writing but also to come to grips with how to situate his own voice in his writing.

P: About the middle of the second semester last year, so in first year, I probably re-read my writings from the first semester, I thought maybe I was just trying to conform to what I would see as academic writing, that it was all very waffle, yeah waffly. I thought this is wrong to be saying this in an academic context but I would have found from reading as a first year student that all academic writing seemed to be on a completely different level of intellect, not that you’d be expecting a colloquial nature to it but that it was very hard to actually connect with a piece of writing and I found that I’d be trying to kind of conform to what I saw as the way to write an academic piece. I kind of thought to myself that’s stupid because I don’t. I’d find it a lot easier to be comfortable in saying, reading something back but being able to put my own voice to it, that when I looked back at the things I’d submitted in Semester 1 that I’d say well anyone could have written that because there’s no personal feel to it, that there’s no attempt to kind of connect with the reader...that it’s all very point after point after point.

(...)

That I wouldn’t be saying here’s the point I want to make but how do I word that in nice flowery language? I kind of got rid of that. To a good degree I’d say, that I felt it wasn’t, I wasn’t helping myself because when you try to make a point and then kind of fluff it up with fancy language it loses its strength and it’s even hard then when I go back, when I’d be proof reading maybe or even a stage before that and trying to see could I get any more ideas into that, at least I’d be able to read it as if I was taking it to somebody and I’d be able to say well, I could add an extra point in there because if Ita was across from me and I was talking this essay through she’d be asking at this point well hold on a minute, what did you mean there? You’re bringing in a conversation to it, yeah.

(...)

I felt my understanding of what I had written improved: that I'd be able to read it now and say, I can hear myself saying it. Even the other day I'd actually looked back at the first essay and I was kind of saying did I write that? It's not me. I kind of feel, I can kind of see I was trying to conform, I wasn't being myself and no wonder I was struggling to get any point across because using flowery language that you wouldn't use on a day to day basis. I don't know, I can't.

This narrative highlights the struggles that can exist for students to adapt to university and to develop a connection with academic writing as well as the accepted discourse of their discipline. It encapsulates Bartholomae's (1986) points about students learning to imitate and parody rather than speaking in a voice that is their own. In this excerpt, Enda mentions frequently that he has to conform to what he believes is the correct academic writing approach but he also acknowledges that this leaves him disconnected from it and, he notes "anyone could have written that". By reviewing his work (of his own volition), he is trying to redress the balance and to work out a way to connect with what he is writing so that he would be able to say "I can hear myself saying it". He is seeking an opportunity to locate his voice but it is still a tentative voice – and he is not sure whether it will meet the expectations of his lecturers or the standards of assessment.

5.4.2 "Why would I have argued this if an academic before me hadn't argued it?" (Narrative ten)

This narrative is taken from an interview with Marie, a mature part-time student on a Master's programme in the Smurfit Graduate School. She returned to study the Bachelor of Business Studies in her thirties and progressed to the Master's programme. Her interview spans her return to study, her present adjustments to postgraduate level and also projects into the future where she is interested in continuing to a doctoral programme. A feature of the entire interview is confidence. She speaks about her lack of confidence starting the Master's programme and the undergraduate. At one part in the interview, she remarks "I was really terrified" when talking about writing her first assignment. In the first part of the narrative, she raise a question that arises in the voice literature - the question of how to articulate an opinion and integrate it with existing literature. In the narrative below, Marie reveals how she began to argue her points, to take ownership and to move into the

zones of voice as opinion and authority or, what Ivanic (1998) might see as *self as author*.

P: Yes they were just saying that I couldn't really construct the argument so I suppose once I... I didn't perfect my academic writing but once I improved it I suppose I tried to concentrate more on my analysis. I kind of felt that you know? That kind of trying to drill it down I just, I hit a wall, couldn't quite get there and again that was a confidence issue for me in that why would my argument matter? You know? Why would I have argued this if an academic before me hadn't argued it? So that was a confidence issue as well, it was like, you know? I felt like if I put this fantastic argument together that somebody would go what? You know? That's...

I: And who are you?

*P: Yes, you know? And who are you and why do you think that this is such a significant argument to make in the HR? Do you think Prof *** would have come up with this and that's where I kind of fell down, I didn't feel that my arguments had any weight really.*

(...)

*P: And I suppose when I, when that, that barrier kind of came down then for me that I kind of went and it was one particular module. It wasn't until Year 3 for T***'s module that I just went for it and I just really let rip with my argument and I just went no, I don't agree with this, everybody else does but I don't and I went for it and he gave me an A and told me he really enjoyed it because I'd finally gone for it you know? And so I felt like I'd kind of started to improve then.*

(...)

P: That was my moment. Yes, that was my moment that I realised that I just needed to let my ideas flow, that I wasn't to kind of give myself any barriers that whatever came to my mind I wrote down, my ideas, my analysis, what I thought, you know? Well what I'd concluded and then moved the academic writing around that.

(...)

*P: And it did I don't know what it lifted, it definitely lifted my spirits and lifted my confidence and I guess T*** can be, he can be quite critical and he's always kind of said he never hands out As and I was the only A in that particular class that year and the fact that he told me that he actually enjoyed reading it meant he probably doesn't even know but the fact that he actually told me that he enjoyed reading it actually brought tears to my eyes. I was going that's a fantastic moment, that somebody, an academic, these people that I hold in such high regard had said to me I actually enjoyed*

reading that, as opposed to just trawling through it and grading it, he actually sat down and went I'm really, I really enjoyed it.

The next part of the conversation happened after the *wordle* discussion and Marie returns to the impromptu conversation with the lecturer from the course. There is a realisation that this conversation about writing was actually a seminal moment for her and she is moved by her recollection and reflections having never considered it prior to our conversation about voice. What's also notable in the excerpt below is the link Marie makes between confidence, authority and power. The gap or space between them – which she had considered vast – then decreased. There is a shift where her confidence is developing in contrast to her earlier fear. Marie recounts how the lecturer whom she had held on a pedestal, becomes less lofty, less intimidating.

*P: When I started to speak to T*** he lost his authority, he lost his power because I realised he was just a human being, he wasn't this authoritative figure who was the be all and end all and I started to argue with some of his ideas in my own head, not out loud but I started to think no I don't particularly agree with that and then I kind of guess when he kind of encouraged me to question it I did because he had lost his authority then you know? And I kind of said, I felt like I had the power then you know? And I felt like I kind of, I could kind of go well no but why would that be you know? And I felt like I had a little bit more confidence then and why should I be wrong and he be right you know?...It really was, it was a very big moment. Yes and I realised that yes he has his ideas but they're not necessarily right, why aren't they right? Because I believe this, why do I believe this and then we smack down the middle do you know? And it was that conversation with T*** that kind of and that word is sticking out in my mind because he did lose some of his authority and even now when I speak to T***, I have still a massive amount of respect for him but he's not that scary ass person that he was back in Year 1 when he just seemed to have it all...When I got to Year 3 I was like I could do that, I could do this, you know? And I guess he started to lose that authority for me and I started to kind of see him on my level more so than a level above me and that kind of helps my argument.*

This narrative picks up on questions of power relations in higher education. The traditional view of the lecturer as the *sage on the stage* seemingly endures and the gap and sense of lack that students feel in terms of their knowledge and ability. What the interview did in this case was help Marie to reflect upon herself and her

conversation with the lecturer through a new frame. Following the interview, she came to me to let me know that our conversation had been enlightening and that it had been important to her.

This narrative is evocative of Freire and his approach to education whereby the student is empowered in a dialogic process through problem-posing education. Benesch (2001) also raises questions about student empowerment in higher education and argues for more critical pedagogy which engages and empowers students within the curriculum. In this narrative and the previous, we are fortunate to glimpse a transformation from a tentative voice to a more confident voice, from a hesitant student to a critical thinker. What is noteworthy in relation to Marie's experience was that it occurred by chance through an impromptu conversation. It was not part of the curriculum and it is quite likely that it might not ever have taken place.

The next narrative demonstrates that it is not just students that have a tentative voice. Often the voice of the novice academic lacks confidence and authority and there is a process of evolving academic identity which can have its own struggles and moments of uncertainty.

5.4.3 “Or do I have anything to say at all?” (Narrative eleven)

In the course of the interview, Anne also reflects on her lack of confidence in relation to writing her doctoral thesis and later her first article for publication. In each stage, she finds it difficult in terms of positioning herself as an authority among other academic voices.

P: So for me it felt very uncreative, very constraining and very defensive and I still carry a bit of anxiety around making a complete eejit out of myself because my feeling is, OK not alone do I have to 'learn Russian' to say this but I also have to figure out whether somebody not somebody said it in German beforehand. So it's a real struggle and also the other thing around voice for me and doing a PhD was, I sort of accidentally once again had stumbled across an area that had not had much research from the perspective sort of from the lens I was looking at, which on the one hand made the university very excited but to me then sort of handed over this weight of expectation around what I might come up with so again I

experienced that as enormously exciting on one hand but a huge burden on the other. So all the time, it's this kind of trying to manage to sets of paradoxical feelings around you know, what is it I am trying to say, who is it I am trying to say it about and in relation to what body of theory and what actually do I think in the middle of a cacophony of voices or do I have anything to say at all?

In the final excerpt below, she describes how she was encouraged by her supervisor to write for publication.

*P: What I heard from R*** in particular was 'own the space, just step into it and own it.' And he would still say that to me when I send him stuff and the inference would be why are you hiding? Because I think there's a degree of hiding that goes on as a novice researcher. I certainly have found it that I need to get over you know? And I think it's that anxiety of getting found out.*

In this narrative Anne's honesty about her vulnerability is striking. In the same way undergraduate students might feel that it is difficult to offer their opinion, she feels the weight of expectation and the need to "own" not only her research but her new academic identity. She uses the term "anxiety" and there is a hint of imposter syndrome when she shares the fear of getting found out. There are a number of things that occur to me in this narrative. The idea of space and time to move into a new identity in the same way that was discussed earlier for students is evident here again. There is also a reticence about joining the academic community and not feeling confident to do so. Her academic supervisor advises her to step into the space and to own it but there is an anxiety there which perhaps is not discussed openly or indeed which is not adequately supported in higher education.

This narrative gives a sense of a rite of passage that exists and this rite of passage theme cropped up for a number of interview participants as they move through different stages along the academic trajectory. It also evokes the sense of belonging or not belonging to a community. In this case, she feels peripheral and her academic supervisor is asking her to step into the space. Goffman (1956) discusses the portrayal of a character as a metaphor for the representation of self in everyday life. The *performance* is where the person plays a part and asks his audience to take him seriously in this role. The audience is asked "to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess, that the task he performs will

have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be” (p.10). Goffman distinguishes two types of performers. There is one that is “fully taken in by his own act” and at the other extreme, “one that is not taken in by his own routine” (p.10). This narrative also evokes Goffman for me and the struggle with different or emerging identities. If we can consider the act of academic writing as a performance and therefore a social interaction, it can be seen as a form of self-representation and performance. In this narrative, we see the latter and the vulnerability of the participant who has not yet accepted that matters are as they appear to be.

The next narrative completes this section on tentative and confident voices. It provides a vista upon the confident voice, that of a well-established academic more secure perhaps in the knowledge that she has something of value to say and also more accustomed to her role of respected authority within an academic community. This narrative offers further insights on the role of publication in the academic’s life but we see it here from a different perspective – from an authoritative and established voice rather than the more tentative one of the early academic. In this piece, despite initial refusal from an academic journal to publish an article, Nessa, a prominent professor in the College of Business, is confident about her own judgement and instincts and she perseveres rather than taking the initial rebuttal lying down.

5.4.4 “I just know it’s a good paper” (Narrative twelve)

*P: In terms of the quality of the journals I’m targeting, my experience makes me absolutely certain no matter what a reviewer or anybody else says that this is a good paper. I just know it’s a good paper. I’m that experienced, that’s given me the confidence right? I had an interesting experience, the school has a little budget to invite people to visit and a guy called H*** came to visit, now I do a fair amount of visiting myself and again I know the rules of the game around that so if anybody comes to visit the school and you’re offered one on one meetings with the person I always take them and then I work out what will I ask, talk to them about, anyway H*** is just exceptionally well published so I asked, I got a slot on the one on one with H*** and the meeting did not go well at all. It went extremely badly...I told H*** about my problem paper. He asked me to tell him about the problem paper which I did, he started asking me questions which I kind of stumbled around over and just there was no meeting of minds at all and I believe that*

*H*** assumed because he hadn't read the paper at this stage, that it wasn't a good paper, because I told him that it got rejected from two journals and I told him what journals and I'd say in his head he was saying it's probably not a good paper. So it was a half hour meeting which just did not go well but his visit consisted of a week and then three weeks later another week so the end of the meeting I said ok H*** would you mind if I sent you the paper and would you have a look at it on the plane over for your next visit and could we meet again, so he said ok and he came the second time and he walked into the room, he gave a seminar on both occasions and I attended both seminars. Walked into the room and he just came over to me and he said like the body language had dramatically changed and he just said I really like your paper and you know? I knew, I knew it, I knew he would, I knew, I knew because I know the paper is a good paper you know? But and all of it comes down to positioning it, now in relation to the rules of the game they are fantastic by the way. The rules of the game are really good and the paper has improved massively, massively since it was rejected the first time...And since it was rejected the second time. So the game is making the paper a lot better and I totally subscribe to the review process. And you know? I've had some lucky breaks on the reviewing process and I've had some unlucky breaks in the reviewing process but broadly speaking I think my work is significantly better by virtue of the double or triple blind review process so I'm completely in favour of the rules of the game and I think it's a mistake to be defensive. So if a reviewer comes back and says there are ten fundamental things wrong with the research I say there are ten fundamental things wrong. The reviewer is the reader and if I can't persuade the reader I have a problem and the problem is I have not written the paper sufficiently well to persuade the reader being one or two reviewers.*

This narrative offers a number of insights about academic writing and the concept of voice as authority. In terms of academic writing for academics, we see the importance placed upon getting published. Nessa is keen to have an outcome for her writing and is particular that it is published in a quality journal. She talks about the *rules of the game* in relation to getting published – meaning the review process and the positioning of the paper to a particular journal. She is not frustrated nor constrained by this but rather praises it as a process that “is making the paper better”. She has the confidence to work with the criticism and initial refusal from the journal rather than be defeated by it. This response to the journal feedback contrasts sharply with the Anne’s response where she was brought to tears and doubted her ability to write at all.

What is different between the confident voice and the tentative voice is authority. Nessa perseveres not only to get published but also, I believe, to validate her own

beliefs and instincts. She is confident in what she has to say and is tenacious about having it heard. She shows a high level of conviction, energy, and perseverance alongside her authority. In contrast to the previous narrative, she has the confidence of one that has a strong sense of belonging to the academic community and therefore feels no reticence about having her voice heard. It must be heard. This concept of voice adds a new dimension to the understanding of authority that was explored in the literature chapter. Authority is also about validation.

This section has presented two different types of voices that exist in academic writing and has shown that they are not specific to stages in the academic trajectory. It is not only the student that might lack confidence in ability and in role, it is a reality for academics too. The final theme in this chapter looks at what impacts peoples' writing and what might affect their confidence as writers.

5.5 Voice Silencers: Personal and Institutional Constraints on Academic Writing

The final theme combines a number of the sub-themes from the analysis which captured the challenges and constraints to academic writing as felt by participants. The four narratives below highlight some of personal struggles as well as institutional constraints that were discussed in the interviews. I have grouped them into a common theme of voice silencers because they speak of the capacity of both individuals and institutions to quell or diminish the writer's voice. These narratives allow us to take a close view of academic writing through a voice lens and once again provide useful perspectives on learning, teaching, assessment and writing in higher education.

The first narrative is part of the interview with a member of academic staff. In the narrative below, Molly provides a powerful depiction of the writing struggles of both students and academic staff. Her rich use of metaphor and imagery also gives us new and vivid ways to consider voice in academic writing.

5.5.1 “Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor” Anne Lamott (Narrative thirteen)

P: And so this was during the first month of the last academic year, so September last year and a woman came in and she was tearful as often happens in a writing consultation; these people are frustrated. They're overwhelmed and clearly this student had done more than her share of reading and research and was very smart and well informed but her problem was with voice in that she had a string of citations so she was drowning in her sources, her citation material and she wasn't there. And so when I tried to give her rhetorical explanations for what she needed to do in order to make an academic argument it didn't work. The frustration levels just rose and the tears rose. She told me quite frankly that where she's from she was told that what you have to say doesn't matter...So she was from Poland. So I tried to tell her we've got a little bit of ground and then what really worked for her was a metaphor. What I thought of was - I said it on the spur of the moment which was just one of those things that come to you when you're in that, the intensity of a writing consultation - I thought of Ginger Rogers and the 1936 film 'Follow the Fleet' and there's this great scene where she's the lead singer and she's at the microphone and then she has three backup singers, one of which is Betty Grable and she is leading the song. Clearly she is the stand out so I said to her you are the one with the microphone, you are under the spotlight. Your sources are your backup singers, they're just there to make you sound better.

(...) Even with staff I find that the idea of process gets lost a lot. So people sit down and I hear the frustration again and again. They think well I should just sit down and write perfection. I have to write for perfection and if I don't then there's something wrong as opposed to recognising that writing is a multi-stage process which begins with brainstorming, goes to drafting and then revision. So if you write, if you try and write for perfection, Anne Lamott has this great quote, 'Bird by Bird', that it's the voice of the oppressor, writing for perfection is the voice of the oppressor. And so that's it, that you not only inhibit the natural flow or impede the natural flow of your writing, the creative process. When you write you get ideas, you think of more things...You close that down and you stop yourself from ever writing anything because once that voice gets power in your head and says you're awful, you can't write anything of value, you have nothing to say with your voice; your voice is meaningless. The same way I would say how we respond to other people's, in a way like your work, your words are an extension of you; when you're not there they're you.

This narrative brings up two themes that emerged in this study. The first is the struggle experienced by students to find a balance between their voice and the voices of other texts – what Whitney (2001) describes as the challenge to situate one's voice

amongst others. Many of the research participants talked about setbacks and frustrations and this story brings this to life. This piece gives a sense of just how upsetting and turbulent the writing process can be for staff and students of higher education. The idea of a young woman in tears is vividly recalled in this narrative and is a moving depiction of the reality for many of the people that I interviewed. What I find interesting here is the imagery that Molly uses to describe voice. She introduces a vibrant, evocative and useful way to consider voice in writing. Elbow (1998) uses a metaphor of *singing ourselves in* to describe writing a sense of self in the writing so that the writer feels his or her own presence in the text. This conversation uses a different musical metaphor to situate the writer in front (at the microphone) with their opinions and ideas and voice clearly present. The backing singers help the melody and add to the overall effect but do not overshadow the lead. As Molly rightly points out, the use of metaphor can help students grasp this concept. It gives them a new perspective to work with and to develop their writing approach.

The second theme in this excerpt relates to perfectionism and to the high stakes writing of higher education. Molly draws on Anne Lamott's contention that one of the inhibitors to writing is a striving for perfectionism which blocks the creative process and impedes the natural flow of ideas. This draws me back to the notion of a lack of space in academia – the space to develop without pressure and, the space to fail. From a student perspective, academic writing is predominantly an assessment exercise so this space does not always exist. Students are writing for high-stake assessment so the grades matter and they feel the pressure. From an academic's perspective too, there is a pressure to publish, to amass citations and to be judged by peers. It is not surprising that many strive for perfectionism and perhaps Lamott gives us a useful parallel from creative writing to consider the accepted approach. Perhaps this pressure inhibits and dries out the very creative process we are seeking to encourage? Brande (1981) uses the analogy of the *slough of despond* which writers enter when they realise that good writing does not come easy and that it involves countless iterations of work as well as many moments of despair. I am not exactly advocating the slough of despond as a rite of passage for students or academics but I wonder whether current drivers and the lack of space within the curriculum prohibit this journey for many writers anyway? I wonder whether

avoiding the slough is an opportunity missed, an opportunity to learn and to overcome, to move from acceptable writing to good writing?

The next narrative dovetails with this piece and looks at writing for assessment from the perspective of John, an undergraduate student. He is a driven student and, in his fourth year of study, seems to have learned what is needed to get the grades he wants. Much of his interview touches on his ambitions for career after university. This narrative captures his approach to writing and to working within the parameters as he perceives them, to gain the grades he wants.

5.5.2 “Once you’ve got everything they want and you know what they want and you can write it in a good format or in a concise manner, then you’re going to get a good grade.” (Narrative fourteen)

P: Recently I’ve taken, the more way I do things is I’d go to the end and see what exactly is needed. The way I approach the exams at the moment is long before the actual exam I would go to the exam papers and see what are the questions they ask. Then you go back through topics and you go to the lectures with that in mind because you know what they’re looking for so you take down what they’re looking for, the answers and then when you’ve got all that information then you know what they’re looking for, you know you have it. You can then just compile it and then it becomes a matter of just writing it out very well in the most concise and precise format they want. They don’t really want something that drags on forever either. Once you’ve got everything they want and you know what they want and you can write it in a good format or in a concise manner then you’re going to get a good grade.

In this part of the narrative, I am struck by the “they” which dominates the excerpt above and more importantly dominates John’s writing space. John is less concerned about what he wants to say and more preoccupied about what he perceives *they* want to hear. The upshot of this is that he is writing for assessment and adopting what much of the literature (see Marton and Saljo, 1976, Biggs, 1999) might call a strategic approach to his learning and his writing. There is a surrender to a set of requirements that involves a mimicking or parodying (Bartholomae, 1986) and John affirms in the interview that this approach is working for him. This narrative also invokes the sense of space or gaps that have emerged in different ways elsewhere in this research. In this case there is a distance portrayed between students and lecturing

staff. The *they* evokes for me the idea of ‘an other’. For this student, there is no sense of belonging to the same community of practice as his lecturers. There is a palpable space between teacher and student.

As the narrative continues, John expands on his writing approach. From the overall interview and from this piece in particular, I got the impression that he is a writer with writing ability who has been dislocated from his writer identity.

P: ...A lot of the modules I do are very analytical, mathematical. It's very fact or fiction. You wouldn't be like oh I think this is the right answer but it could be this because I like the guy or something like that. It would be very much what you know. But when it comes to other things like venture or just the more theory based modules then you would but then again I wouldn't say it's very common in them either because then it really depends on your knowledge of the theories as well. It would be different if I was doing an English course because then it would be very subjective and a lot on your opinion which I do miss; I loved writing in secondary school, I got an A in English because I just loved writing stories or talking about the poetry and the effect and all that kind of thing. It doesn't really input much here.

I: Ok. So you said you like writing, that's interesting. Do you enjoy writing the assignments here?

P: I do like writing the assignments but for a different reason. When I was writing stories it was more about how inventive and creative you can be and how humorous and how well, like the stories would roll off your tongue. You're like that definitely sounds good and then you read through it. Like one of the things I remember from secondary school, I wrote this brilliant story and I can actually remember people handing it around and reading it because it was so funny. When it comes to college work and the work in particular I'm doing you don't really write it to be humorous or funny or entertaining. You write it in the way that it's the best way you could possibly describe what you're doing and when you come off with a brilliant phrase or just the words seem just right for the situation it kind of feels rewarding because you know, yeah I've definitely described that in a brilliant way and it's going to impress whoever is reading it especially when it comes to CVs or something like that.

I: So you write very much with the reader in mind would it be fair to say?

P: Yeah, it's critically important. It's like when you're bringing a product into the market and I'm using a business phrase here, I'm a business student, like you don't bring a product into the market without considering your customer. That used to be the old way of doing things but nowadays you wouldn't get away with that. You always have to have who you're giving the product to in mind. Writing is another product in itself. It's just information.

(...)

P: A lot of people as well always aim to reach the target; they don't exceed the target and then bring it back down. They try to just make the words to get up there. I think that has a lot to do; it depends on how interested you are in the topic. I remember the other day we had something small due, about 500 words and we were just coming up with ways to reach the 500 words; we weren't actually trying to think of a quality answer. We were just trying to think of something that would just do.

I: And why was that? Was it because you weren't that bothered about the subject?

P: Because it was not very important. It wasn't graded at all. So we just really wanted; it was specification for an assignment that's due later so we were basically describing what we were going to do with our main assignment. Just feedback for the lecturer so that she knows what's going on basically. And since it wasn't really marked or graded we just knew it didn't really matter.

The second part of this narrative captures a focus on the output winning over the process and brings to life the strategic approach adopted by a student when the measures of grading eclipse learning. What is also notable from a writing perspective is John's analogy of writing in marketing terms. As he remarks, he is a business student so it is unsurprising that he adopts marketing language to describe his writing as a *product* and the reader as a *customer*. What is notable is that this contrasts so sharply with the creative writing that he describes from school where he wrote a "brilliant story" that gave him and others pleasure. This is a student who appears to like writing but his academic writing is differentiated from his creative writing and seems to be situated outside him somehow. The creative aspects of writing have taken a more instrumental turn. The writing is displaced from the writer.

The next narrative returns to Enda, the second year student and picks up another example of writing for assessment. This narrative once more raises the notion that particular writing habits are being developed by students which seem to be more about mimicking academic writing than about developing an aptitude for writing critically.

5.5.3 “I suppose you don’t allow yourself then to give your true opinion on it because you feel kind of constrained by what you assume the person will want you to write.” (Narrative fifteen)

P: But I found that a challenge because you’re always thinking what does the person correcting this want and you kind of-in your head-you’re saying well when I’m talking about management obviously I’d better refer to whatever it was referred to in the lecture or kind of what were the key words. I suppose you don’t allow yourself then to give your true opinion on it because you feel kind of constrained by what you assume the person will want you to write, that the lecturer or whatever will be correcting it will be kind of saying I told them to write this and they better tick this box and that box, the other box. (...) It sounds very silly now to me when I’m saying it like that but you kind of felt like a pressure to conform to what you’re meant to be writing here and that obviously at the end of the day you want your grades to be at a certain level. If it means writing what the person, what the lecturer wants you to write well then you’ve to go with that. That was probably the hardest to actually sit down and write something and keep a lecturer’s kind of key ideas, key points in mind instead of just letting myself go and answering the question as I felt I should be answering it, yeah.

Similarly to the previous example, this narrative captures what it means to students to adopt a strategic approach to their writing even when it is not their natural inclination. Enda finds it a challenge “always thinking what does the person correcting this want”. He talks about conforming and ticking boxes and sees this as the way to achieve the grades. He is learning this approach and shutting down a preference to come up with his own ideas in favour of replicating the lecturer’s. While there is extensive existing literature that discusses the existence of a strategic approach in higher education, this narrative captures the inherent struggle of a student who is adopting this approach. This narrative shows that mimicry is not the natural inclination for all students and in this case, it involves a degree of personal compromise that is not discussed in the literature. In an earlier part of this chapter, I looked at tentative voices and perhaps this narrative shows that the lack of confidence, in some cases, could relate to writing in a way that feels more like imitation, where identity is forged out. This narrative, like the previous, raises questions that are bigger than the individual stories. These questions traverse teaching, assessment and curriculum. They pose challenges to educational practitioners already working in a busy and demanding environment but nonetheless they are questions that should not be ignored.

The final narrative is part of the same conversation with Enda. It prompts us to consider how the writing habits of students are developing at university and furthermore to consider the processes and procedures in the academic environment which might be inhibiting rather than encouraging students' development and learning. This narrative is reproduced extensively because it raises valuable questions for us all to consider.

5.5.4 “That’s plagiarising even though it came from me but I’d better find that!” (Narrative sixteen)

P: ...And I suppose when I think about it even in the latest essay I’ve done, ‘The people at work’ essay, there were one or two cases where I would have said that opinion sounds like or could be taken to come from someone’s work and that’s plagiarising even though it came from me but I’d better find that! It just sounds nonsensical but it’s what I’ve done.

I: So you’re nearly afraid to put your own opinion without somehow referencing it even if it came from you?

P: That’s it, yeah.

I: And where has that come from?

P: Fear of plagiarism. The fear that you’d be seen to take someone else’s work and use it as your own even though you didn’t. But it’s the fear that, like obviously it’s rightly looked down upon but when I haven’t gone and I suppose it’s not to leave myself open for that kind of questioning. Where did you come up with this opinion and me being kind of well I’m not sure, it was just my gut instinct that I felt strongly about it. But I suppose it was the fear that somebody will say but obviously doing this module you know that X wrote about that in that way and they cited whoever who had that opinion and how come you haven’t? The iron fist is above you and you’re kind of thinking, yeah I’d better not leave myself open for kind of questioning, yeah.

I: And what has that kind of sensitivity to that plagiarism within a school? Like have you been guided on that? Have there been workshops about referencing within the Business School?

P: The first time I ever came across a referencing workshop was two weeks ago. So maybe a year and a half into Business and Law we have Foundations of Management Thought module and we had a tutorial dedicated on how to reference in the Harvard style. So I suppose it’s a module that is taken by first years so first year commerce take it. So I suppose we wouldn’t have ever had... all the business subjects just probably assume well if Foundations of Management Thought are covering that there’s no point us regurgitating

the same information but every module obviously does provide you with the UCD, the general plagiarism policy of how serious an offence it is. I suppose they even, I notice actually this year I haven't seen a plagiarism percentage coming up on Blackboard when I'd submit an essay. That seems to be hidden, that only the lecturer can see it. Last year I think twice, yeah for two law assignments I had, you get the percentage of plagiarism which is a very scary thing when you're submitting an essay and you're waiting, what percentage did I get? Even though you don't know if you'd submitted your essay half an hour before the deadline or two days I suppose that'll change your percentage but that kind of creates a fear then that when you click submit you're waiting to see what percentage is going to come up here. And it would be a topic of conversation.

I: Would it? Your classmates?

P: Yeah. That everybody would be, like after asking did you get that submitted on time, the next question would be what was your plagiarism percentage? Yeah I suppose all, everyone in Business and Law anyway, we were all, we'd be all worried about God what happens if, say if your friend was 20% and I was 40% I'd have that niggling worry. What does the lecturer think they're after receiving on whatever document and say an asterisk beside my name and saying 40% plagiarism and then they'll look into that. Like will I be called in over something and then I'd be thinking God well I definitely didn't plagiarise.

(...)

I: And how much do you think that has- if you think back over your assignments to date- has guided your writing or shaped how you write your academic assignments, how much of an influence has?

P: An impact of the fear of plagiarism is it?

I: Yeah. That kind of worry that you have at the back of your mind in terms of the writing.

P: Yeah it would impact. Every sentence I write I'd be kind of making either a mental note or writing it down, check that point to see can I come up with a source for it; that I'd be, even though if you'd to take all my notes away and give me a blank sheet and tell me to write points- even though the points I've made are obviously not coming exactly from any specific author- that I'd feel the need to say where did that point come from, where did I get that idea and actually try and source it and nearly re-trace the whole like learning, learning without realising. I might have read a point and not written it down but it still ended up in my head and used later on as a kind of a key idea but then I'd have the worry of where did that come from.

I: It sounds like you're doing forensic science!

- P: Because you're just worried. Exactly it does, doesn't it yeah! Crime scene investigator.*
- I: Is there learning in that or is that a step? Is that about covering and ensuring and being kind of comfortable and secure or is there learning in that?*
- P: A learning in?*
- I: That process, that forensic CSI bit?*
- P: No. It's more, and I know my friends would think the same thing, it's more time consuming, annoying part when you think you have the perfect essay and then you say oh God I've to reference things now. But by referencing things now you just mean I'd better make sure I haven't made any original points because then definitely not original because somebody has thought of them before; I'm not unique here! Yeah because you, like it's very hard to kind of pinpoint the exact moment...It's time-consuming and it is frustrating because you're saying on one hand you're trying to fulfil... did the student tick all the boxes referencing wise and you want to appear original as well but the balance I suppose is lost because you can't.*
- I: And how can you remember? Was that ever communicated to you as a way of doing it as a process or is that something that just evolved because maybe you haven't had that training or tutorial?*
- P: Yeah, well I think the first thing was the fear was probably put into me in the first three weeks of first year in the technology kind of lectures we were given because we were... one of the tasks was to copy and paste an article from Wikipedia, put it into a Word document and submit to SafeAssign. So we were shown then 100% plagiarism and you kind of think, alarm bells are going off in your own head even though it's, everybody has 100% written but you're still thinking God the system is good... I suppose that's where the fear came from but we were never, that module and you wouldn't expect the technology module to have anything to do with helping you to avoid kind of any misconceptions about plagiarism or fears you might have but I suppose it was an awakening that there was a programme that was going to vet everything I submitted and be able to call up the points I've made and put an author beside it which is kind of fearful in my own head, that you're thinking oh God I didn't come into UCD with that idea in my head so I've definitely got it from somewhere but where have I got it from? Through all your information again just in case you'd be called in and have to explain to somebody where did that information come from and you'd be kind of left well, it just happened to be in my head. That won't stand up.*

There are so many things that strike me in this excerpt. First of all, the number of times that he uses the word *fear* in respect of his learning and writing. He uses other adjectives and nouns to capture an abiding mistrust of the system and his doubts for

his own integrity that sounds almost Orwellian: “alarm bells”, “scary”, “offence”, “iron fist”, “serious”, “worried”, and “not leaving myself open”. What replaced teaching about academic writing in Enda’s first year was a short session of plagiarism shock therapy and it had unduly negative consequences on the students. This excerpt emphasises the importance of developing writing skills and including conversations about voice, opinion and referencing as part of a wider education on writing. This student and his friends are fearful of being caught out – so much so that they are searching for sources even when they come up with an idea. They find themselves in an “annoying” and “time-consuming” process that adds no value to their learning but serves only to undermine the development of their critical engagement with texts.

I recall being surprised by this revelation during the interview. I did not expect to hear about this kind of frustration in writing or indeed this kind of odd fusion of voices where the texts of other writers are used to add weight after the assignment has been written. This excerpt points to a vacuum in the education pathway where Enda and his classmates could be better employed developing their knowledge and criticality. The College has an opportunity to reflect not only upon its current offering for first year students but also upon what is lacking. These students are the tentative voices, lacking confidence and skills. There is an opportunity to empower them to engage critically with the curriculum and to empower them to be confident student writers.

5.6 Conclusion to Chapter

These narratives have been presented to provide a window on people’s stories relating to voice and academic writing in university. The narratives show the perspectives and experiences close up. They give external expression to internal representation of phenomena (Andrews et al., 2013).

What emerged in these narratives is more than I anticipated. By asking the questions about voice and writing, participants reflected on their experiences and provided a rich commentary on other areas of higher education. There is much to learn from

these stories and there is an opportunity through these stories to consider practices in teaching and assessment as well as reviewing the ways in which academic supports and indeed policies in areas such as plagiarism are implemented. What also emerged in the research was the personal benefit felt by the participants. When asked questions about their writing and when asked to consider voice, they reflected on their own academic practice in a way that shifted their perspectives and aided them to consider their writing approach. The questioning process was in itself a learning opportunity for the participants. This was not anticipated but it has made me consider that perhaps the engagement needed to enhance writer development is less about teaching and more about conversation.

Chapter 6

Exploring Concepts: Impressions, Discussions and Themes

6.1 Introduction

The second research objective of this thesis is to explore concepts of voice. The purpose of this chapter is to further examine the different meanings of voice that emerged during the research phase. As part of the data analysis, I combed through all interview transcripts again – this time to focus specifically on the discussions that took place in relation to voice and to relay participants' perspectives. This chapter both complements and adds to the literature review chapter. It continues to consider existing voice meanings and offers more personal interpretations. It also presents new, thought-provoking perspectives and introduces new metaphors for voice not previously heard.

Similarly, this chapter complements the previous findings chapter. This time, instead of focussing on the stories and experiences of the participants, it hones in on the discussions that took place and in so doing provides new layers of meaning for voice for us to consider. As with the last chapter, I see my role as that of curator and commentator – providing a setting for participants' voices to be heard while also explaining, contextualising and commenting based on my analysis of data. The structure of this chapter posed a challenge initially. There was a great deal of data and not enough space to present each interview in detail so I had to consider the best way of presenting the exploration of voice and including my analysis. My approach was to create three parts to this chapter which are explained below.

The first part of the chapter originates from the field notes that I wrote as part of the data gathering process. Here I relate my impressions of each participant's sense of voice. These impressions were noted on a sheet at the back of my field notes journal directly after each interview and before any research analysis was conducted. I include the sheet in Table 5 below. It is important to note that these impressions are purely my interpretation of participant's sense of voice in that they are my thoughts and not those of the participants. They represent my observations at a given time in

the research process. I have chosen to include these impressions in the findings because I think they have some value. They capture a moment in time during the research process and add a different dimension to the findings in that they are neither analysed nor tidy but are rather emergent and unaffected. They have a value also because their inclusion can help readers' understanding of the research process and their judgement of my findings and analysis.

The second part of the chapter explores the participants' concepts of voice. Initially, this part of the chapter was to be presented as findings on a case-by-case basis with a short discussion on what each participant considered voice to mean. The challenges of extensive data and limited space forced me to re-think my approach and I think propelled me to come up with a more fitting way of disseminating the concepts of voice. Mirroring the format of the literature chapter, this part of the chapter presents discussions on a selection of metaphors and meanings for voice and provides a second voice wordle which is based on the participants' perspectives. This approach allows for the inclusion of the varied perspectives through the wordle but it also facilitates more considered discussion on the exchanges where more nuanced or new perspectives on voice emerged. The voice discussions below add to the literature and present some novel ways to consider voice and its applicability in discussions on academic writing.

The third section of this chapter presents thematic analysis. Like the previous chapter, this is an inductive process where the themes emerged over the course of the data analysis. Two major themes are discussed in detail below and I have included a number of excerpts from the interviews which enable a more in-depth examination of the themes and which also highlight the different viewpoints of the participants. There was some crossover between themes emerging in the voice discussions and the narratives previously examined. I chose to focus on different themes here which would accompany the previous analysis rather than repeating some of the points already made. My intention in this chapter is to provide a wide-ranging discussion of voice in all its glory. As in the previous chapter, my intention is also to provide analysis that will stimulate further discussion and raise salient questions about the context and circumstances in which people are asked to write in higher education.

6.2 Impressions of Voice from Field Notes

I began writing field notes following the first interview. I did so because it was recommended in the narrative research literature and I saw it as a good way for me to reflect upon what took place during the interviews. In addition to my notes about the interview process, I jotted down my impressions of the significance of voice to each participant based on my interpretation of what they said or emoted most strongly in the interview. I did this intuitively because I got a strong sense of the participant's particular view on voice and felt right to record it (without knowing at this stage whether it was a worthwhile exercise). My impressions were noted in the back of my field note journal after each interview. Some of my ideas and impressions inevitably evolved as I conducted the research analysis and had the opportunity to examine the data. However, in some cases my impressions tally with the findings that emerged in the research analysis. The table below is scanned from my field notes journal. Below this I explain these impressions.

Meanings of Voice for Participants

- ① Authenticity, Judgment, Demerity, Authority
- ② "Something to Say"
- ③ Expression of opinion & ideas
- ④ Identity
- ⑤ Authority
- ⑥ Person & Perspective
- ⑦ Community, Language
- ⑧ finding voice) Confidence
- ⑨ Assertiveness
- ⑩ Strategically measured
- ⑪ Conversation and Connection

Table 5: Impressions of Voice from Field Notes

Participant 1 - Adam: *Authenticity, Judgement, Veracity, Authority*

My sense here was that Adam was interested in the veracity of research and he strongly emphasised that you had to be able to back up empirically what you were saying. The voice had to be clear, reliable and trustworthy.

Participant 2 - Sean: *Something to Say*

My impression here was of someone that was on a very personal journey in his writing. He had something to say that was important for himself on a personal level and for his research. He gave me a sense of a mission that his research would do something worthwhile. His voice was passionate. It had set a course of direction for his career path and along the way, it had helped him overcome his particular challenges with academic writing and had made him determined to succeed.

Participant 3 – Ellen: *Expression of Opinion and Ideas*

Ellen exuded energy and purpose. She had a wealth of ideas and convictions and wanted a platform for these to be heard. She shared a sense of frustration that, as part of her doctoral process, she was being constrained (albeit with good intentions) by her supervisor and by academic conventions that dictated what should be said and how it should be said. Voice for her was about the expression of her ideas and the ability to communicate her opinion through her research.

Participant 4 - Anne: *Identity*

This interview seemed to be all about identity. Anne had a very keenly evolved sense of self and her own identity journey. She described her vulnerability adopting a new academic identity which meant writing as ‘expert’. Her sense of voice was part of this evolving process of figuring out who she was, what she had written, what she was currently writing and what she was going to write in the future.

Participant 5 - Nessa: *Authority*

My impressions of Nessa's take on voice centred on authority and assuredness. She is a committed teacher, researcher and writer with vast experience and knowledge in her field. She talked extensively about the importance of publishing papers and being an expert in the field.

Participant 6 - Molly: *Person and Perspective*

Molly had a strong understanding of writing as a process and was familiar with concepts of voice. Voice in writing was about the person and their individual perspective. The author should not be hidden nor disguised by language or artifice. The writer should take centre stage.

Participant 7 - Alex: *Community, Language*

Alex is a postdoctoral researcher. His sense of voice related to his right to be heard as a member of an academic community. Voice is a means of communication and language to engage with his peers in this scholarly community.

Participant 8 -Marie: *Finding Voice, Confidence*

My impression of Marie was that she was on a personal journey where she was developing both her ability to articulate her opinions and views but also her confidence to do so. She related a sense of inadequacy and a sense that academics were on a pedestal. She was finding her voice and confidence with a view to enabling her to converse with academics on a more equal basis.

Participant 9 -Stephen: *Assertiveness*

Stephen spoke frequently of assertiveness in his writing and this related to his expression of ideas and opinions and moving away from purely regurgitating the opinions of others. He related that he had learned that he could put his thoughts and ideas into his academic writing and that this felt right.

Participant 10 - John: *Strategically Measured*

John, a fourth-year student with his mind on life after university had strong ambition and a clear sense of purpose in terms of his future career. My impression was that his studies and writing were a vehicle to get him where he needed to go. He spoke of academic writing in terms of writing for the reader (lecturer) and the importance of meeting standards and expectations. His voice was tailored to fit the needs of assessment. It was strategically measured so that he would meet his educational and career goals.

Participant 11 - Enda: *Conversation and Connection*

For Enda, voice was about being part of a conversation. As a second-year student, he was trying to figure out how he could relate to the writing of others as well as his own writing. He wanted to connect with what he wrote and he wanted to connect with what he read but found it difficult to do so.

We see in the table and explanations above that a unique meaning for voice emerged at each interview. I do not wish to overstate the generalisability of this finding, given the number of participants involved and given that these are my impressions before conducting research analysis. However, it is worth considering the significance of this finding within the context of this research. For eleven participants, there are eleven different impressions of voice unfolding in the field notes. This speaks of the individuality of participants' perspectives and captures the very personal nature of voice. This project considers the different perspectives of voice in academic writing and this small recording exercise provides an indication of the richness and diversity of voice.

From a methodological perspective too, these findings have a value in that they testify to the usefulness of field notes and bring to life Clandinin and Connolly's (2000) assertions about the three-dimensional space of narrative inquiry where the researcher moves "backward and forward, inward and outward" (p.54). These notes provide a snapshot of researcher impressions that are unedited and which occur at a particular moment in the research process. Keeping the notes helped me consider

my own impressions and how they related to my analysis further on in the process. In some instances, my impressions were simply reinforced by my analysis of the findings (for example, in the case of Molly) and in others (for example, Enda), the data analysis added greater depth and complexity to my initial interpretation. This moving backward, forward, inward and outward add greater granularity to the findings and made me a more considered and reflexive researcher.

6.3 Voice Discussions

In all interviews, participants were asked to explain what they understood voice to mean. They were asked about voice in general terms and were then asked to comment upon the possible meanings of voice as presented in the voice wordle diagram which I brought to the interviews (see p.82). The wordle was a helpful tool at the interviews and generated valuable discussion but I also found that in many cases, participants offered fascinating perspectives based on their own ideas and experience without need for the wordle prompt.

I have created and inserted a second wordle diagram below to give a sense of the variety and diversity of meanings that emerged in all the interviews. This second wordle has some crossover with the first in that it includes some of the previous meanings that featured in discussions. However, it also introduces new meanings or different nuances to existing metaphors that emerged during these conversations. I have opted to discuss these newer concepts in more detail below while giving a brief summary of some of the participants' views on some of the existing concepts of voice given that they have been previously discussed.

Table 6 Wordle 2: Participant Perspectives on Voice



The table above sets out the participant perspectives on voice based on the analysis of data. Some familiar meanings emerge. *Authority* for example featured in the voice discussions and once again related to the sense of entitlement to speak or offer opinion which crops up at different stages of the academic path and which appears to present challenges to academic writers. Molly comments:

So when we say power or authority what that does is again sort of reinforcing this idea that only a limited number of people get to have that voice or have that role and we can't compare with them because they're the experts or they're the top names in their fields.

Authority also featured in the discussion with Marie. Her interpretation of authority also related to standing and power:

From my point of view anyway that authority is a big barrier because you do feel like they are the be all and end all of everything and your voice is just like a little whisper in the grand scheme of things and why would it matter, whereas I think if you feel that it does matter, that your opinions and your ideas and you know? Your theories or whatever are your voice and that is important than I think that can only help a student kind of you know? Like their confidence and their input into their own education.

Marie remarked in the interview that authority is something that “jars on me”. She effectively conveys images of power and powerlessness through her analogy of voice with authority and voice as whisper. Marie takes a Freirean stance in her appraisal of the importance of students being empowered.

Authentic also cropped up in the discussion with Adam, a lecturer in the Quinn School. He described a different view of authentic from that which featured in the literature. He asserted “It’s got to be authentic to the material” which conveys an emphasis upon veracity and researcher trustworthiness rather than conviction (Elbow, 1994) or a combination of self-knowledge and disciplinary familiarity (Whitney, 2011). While a large number of participants showed a more critical leaning in their academic writing approach, Adam’s take on authenticity suggests that a more conventional approach still prevails.

A number of the participants picked up on the socially-centred meanings of voice. Alex, a postdoctoral researcher noted: “I think we bring everything with us with everything we do”. While Anne described her understanding of voice as something that is contingent and shifting:

My understanding of voice is that there is more than just one and that it’s just contingent on context and in thinking about it prior to the interview, it’s also something that changes and evolves over time and you know my academic voice is different from my consultant voice. So yeah I think, I don’t have a very fixed idea of what voice is or looks like outside of the context in which it is being considered.

Opinion also featured in discussions and there was some confusion on the part of some participants on how to integrate their opinions into their academic writing. For Stephen, an MA student, it is what he called “putting a human aspect” into the writing. In the excerpt below, his view of what the human aspect entails becomes more apparent and takes on more weighty connotations encompassing personal freedom and power:

I mean who is putting the critical part of the analysis? It has to be the person so I mean if you’re not given voice and that’s a power thing possibly, it’s a lot of different things then it’s like you know, that’s something you could akin

it to something in politics or in democracy, you have a vote but you can't vote.

During the interview, Stephen became more interested in the idea of voice never having previously considered it. The excerpt above is part of the conversation where he is talking as he is thinking and actively meaning-making. As a result of this conversation, he starts to question his positionality in his writing. The conversation has an impact on him.

These excerpts offer a flavour of some of the discussions on concepts of voice. They show the keen interest among the participants as well as the ease with which they engage with the existing meanings of voices. While this section does not go into great detail, it demonstrates that voice resonates with participants at all stages of the academic path. Students and academics of varied experience in writing had plenty to say about existing metaphors and also had new interpretations to offer.

6.3.1 Voice as the Sociological Imagination

During Sean's interview, his strong sense of purpose in relation to his academic writing came across. Sean's sense of voice is set in the domain of the personal and the social - a milieu where his biography and beliefs are continually interacting within his academic writing. Voice for Sean is a vehicle for communicating this interaction. He has something to say and a drive to make a statement. Writing thus has a purpose which relates to a personal and ideological crusade. He observed that for him, "voice is how your own personal experience essentially drives the text". He expanded on how he views the position of the academic writer in relation to his or her writing:

No matter how much people try to bury it and couch it in a language of objectivity and distance and that kind of thing, it's always going to be there. I think your particular background and your class and your gender is always going to colour that.

Against this backdrop, Sean's interview also yielded a new interpretation of what voice means. He commented: "I guess voice - my thinking of it was imagination, the sociological imagination". For him it relates to his sense of purpose in writing and his choice of research interest and career motivation where he takes the initiative to relate personal experiences to the wider society. Mills (2000) explained that the sociological imagination "enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (p.6). Voice for Sean is a way of doing this. His view resonates with Richardson (2005) who talks about refracting her life through a sociological lens and explains that the process of thinking deeply and writing moves her to a space where she can "see more clearly the interrelationships between and among people worldwide" (p.967). For Sean, voice is a way of putting the sociological imagination into practice. This take on voice is rich with meaning and also potential. It presents the voice of the writer as social commentator. It draws together the personal and the public. Through this lens, we do not have to distinguish voice as either individually-centred or socially-centred because it is both simultaneously.

6.3.2 Voice as Unique Perspective, Your Own Thoughts, Myself

When asked directly what voice means, Molly answers: "what voice means in academic writing is that that it is your unique way or perspective of seeing the world". She further explains that this is about going through the research process, positioning yourself at the helm and saying: "here is something I want to show to you through my understanding and my research and work." It is about saying you have something to offer. Molly's ideas here traverse a number of different conceptions of voice. First of all, she alludes to identity. Ritchie (1989) and Ivanic (1998) both draw on the Bahktinian metaphor of the *rich stew* to describe how each individual has a unique discourse drawn together through their own distinctive life experiences. Molly describes this as having your own unique perspective on the world. Molly also alludes to the notion of voice as authority in terms of taking ownership for one's own work and research. There is something about empowerment here too. Voice is being able to stand up and say here is something I want to show

you. It is about standing up to be counted and participating in a communal discourse. This conception of voice as agency continues for other participants too.

For Ellen, voice is “giving your own kind of thoughts and expressions on stuff a little bit more than I do now”. Throughout the interview, the sense of being thwarted in her work came across so, in a sense, it is not surprising that for Ellen, the idea of voice relates to freedom of expression in her writing and the ability to put herself in her work. In the excerpt below, she describes it light-heartedly but the frustration is nonetheless unmistakable:

I knew that I had this struggle and this tension where I wanted to kind of have a voice but I hadn't kind of broken out and said I am doing this until my personal statement where I did it in a very obvious manner. So I suppose I'm constantly trying to do it in a very subtle manner in my work but I wouldn't have called it voice, I'd have called it my pain in the arse work, but I realise that it probably is voice that I'm trying to incorporate.

Further on in the discussion she picked up on the term *Agency* in the wordle and it seemed to resonate with her again in relation to a greater sense of freedom which she desires:

Agency, being able to go out and be - not yourself as in personality but - myself as a thinker and be allowed express my thoughts. I don't mean go and gobble but I don't mean to be a total idiot but just to be able to expand on ideas a little bit more, not constantly have to reference every single thing that I say...be allowed to explore ideas without - my supervisor is constantly going “where did that idea come from”. Well I thought of it! Am I allowed have an individual thought like?

In another interview, Enda discussed the challenges he found in relation to his academic writing and mentioned the sense of feeling constrained by trying to conform to what he thought was the way to write. This left him feeling disconnected from his writing. He noted: “when I would have been looking back at my writings in the first semester of first year that I said that's not me”. In the excerpt below, he relates how he had recently adopted a new approach to his writing and conveys a sense of freedom in his newfound form of expression:

I didn't feel, as I said earlier, constrained, restricted by what I felt I needed to write. That I was able to be myself, to actually say am I happy with what has been written on paper here? Yeah, am I able to read it in my own voice?

Enda and Ellen convey the frustration and confusion that can arise. These are students who feel they would like to engage in discussion and not regurgitation. They would like to feel that they can express their ideas and views but are confused by the directions that they receive or the assumptions they have made about what is *allowed* in academic writing. Ritchie (1989) talks about the need for writing workshops where “people who can participate in a constant evolution of personal and communal meaning and who will not be easily silenced” (p.173). Benesch (2000) advocates for a more critical pedagogy where students, participating in a more dialogic relationship with their teachers feel empowered to examine discourses and challenge *limit-situations* of society. Molly's observation above is perhaps a useful starting point for frank discussion between supervisors and lecturers to have with their students: “here is something I want to show to you through my understanding and my research and work”.

6.3.3 Voice as a Bit of Flair

The idea of a bit of flair is very close to the idea of distinctive style which features in the first wordle and is one of the early expressivist ideas about voice where it is about having a recognisable and sincere presence on the page (see Stewart, 1972). John offered another take on being *distinctive* however. His bit of flair, his distinctive voice is strategic. It is his way to use his voice to stand out from the crowd and to separate himself:

It's an art really, getting the balance between sticking with the tried and tested proper way of doing things and bringing in your own bit of flair... In terms of assignments trying to bring in sources or viewpoints that they wouldn't have assumed when they were writing...I would always try to be different for strategic purposes. I think it's the optimal way of doing things. You don't want to do what everyone else is doing because like - there was a good phrase - basically if you're not standing out you're not really going to get any further. If you keep doing, if you keep doing as you always have done you'll get what you always got. So if you do what everyone else is doing, you're going to get what everyone else is doing. You kind of have to

stand out and there is this strategic element to that. But it's also for your own curiosity as well because you want to see if you do this what happens, if you do something different.

John sees voice as an instrument. Having voice is not the end goal but he uses voice to achieve his goals (in this case, it is about his academic assignments). He considers voice in terms of having an impact on his reader and as a way of distinguishing himself from the crowd. It is also about experimentation and about his curiosity, to see what happens “if you do something different”. John takes some risks, but they are calculated risks.

6.3.4 Voice as Language of a Community

In his interview, Alex spoke frequently of the importance of feeling part of a community. He saw voice as an accepted language or as a way of communicating within the community. There were rules, but, as he noted philosophically, you had to accept the rules to be part of it:

You have free speech and in a way we don't but it's kind of, what I'm trying to say now I chose to enter this community. That was my choice to be with this community then I have to accept the constraints on my freedom of speech which I'm happy to give up in the same way that you're happy to give up certain parts of your freedom to feel safe within the society you're in.(...) That's what I'm trying to say, you need this kind of freedom, you need yourself to be talking, you need to be understanding as well that you are part of a community and as long as you're part of that community you need to communicate and in order to communicate with people you need agreement on the words you're using. In order to have agreement on the words you're using you need to give up some of the freedom.

What is noteworthy here is the freedom of expression sought eagerly by a number of participants is, in a sense, relinquished by Alex for the sake of membership and acceptance. He accepts that you need to give up some freedom so that you can communicate effectively with other community members. There is a pragmatism in evidence as he notes the need for “agreement on the words you are using”. This agreement relates to the academic conventions but also perhaps to language, style

and format of writing deemed acceptable or appropriate. While pragmatic, this *agreement* also has an elitist air about it. Alex's community refers to his academic peers in the research world. This community does not necessarily encompass the students or the wider public who may well continue to feel alienated by a language that is clearly not for them. Alex's views are similar to Kamler and Thomson (2008) who view the doctoral process as being a process of *becoming* and *belonging*. The *belonging* refers to being a member of an academic community. Kamler and Thomson also underline the importance of the insider language of the academic community as being the "shared 'internal' understandings and languages as allowing the community to do its work". This is not academic jargon, they argue but rather is something that acts like a glue which "binds members together and also marks off those who do not belong" (p.30).

6.3.5 Voice as Reputation and Corpus in the Field

The focus of Nessa's interview was the importance of publication for academics and the importance of the doctoral process as the pathway to publication. Nessa's expression of voice was related principally to expertise and reputation. The excerpt below encapsulates the importance she attaches to having a voice in the literature, a voice that is recognised and acknowledged by your peers:

And I see people finishing a PhD and getting no publications out of their PhD. That's a lousy experience you know?...So in terms of finding your own voice your experience at the doctoral training stage is make or break (...)And they never learnt the rules of the game and if you don't know the rules of the game you're just not going to be able to get published you know? And then why don't they know the rules of the game? Because they had a terrible PhD supervisor. So the doctoral training is really critical in finding your own voice and finding it quickly (...) And I suppose in a way how do you find your voice, just keep doing more and more of it. So this notion articulated by people who don't do research or are research active and who have little ways of pretending that they are research active and all the rest but you know? All you need is one key paper? Forget it! You need to be doing, you need to be you know? Do one key paper and another and another and another and then people are beginning to say hold on a moment she's got a body of work which added together demonstrates an expert. She just didn't put out one article you know? So you've got to, that's how you build your

reputation. That's how you find your voice is that you keep on doing more and more."

This excerpt raises a number of points. First of all, it introduces a new meaning for voice. Voice is reputation in a field of research where there is acknowledgement for contribution to knowledge and expertise. Voice takes work. Nessa sees writing for academic journals as a continuing endeavour. It is about building up a body of work. Elsewhere in the interview, she notes: "and it was developing the corpus that you know? You know? That you know? You're not going to become a recognised expert from one paper." It takes time before the "leaders of the field are beginning to notice you".

The second point raised in the excerpt above relates to Nessa's mention of finding voice. She sees the doctoral process as the route to finding voice and emphasises the importance of having a good supervisor with a focus on helping the student get published as part of the doctoral process. Beyond this, there should follow a continual drive to publish. This is the way to build a corpus and to be recognised. Finding voice here is about being heard by your peers. This interview features a discussion on *rules of the game* in relation to academic writing. Like Alex, Nessa is also pragmatic. The rules are something to be learned and processed to achieve the goal of publication.

Finally, this excerpt also speaks of the wider context of writing for publication. Nessa emphasises the importance of publishing for doctoral students and emerging academics and creates the impression of an environment of pressure and scrutiny. She maintains that "the doctoral training is really critical in finding your own voice and finding it quickly" Once achieved, there is a continuation of pressure as Nessa asserts the need for developing and maintaining voice in the field. There is also perhaps a glimpse of judgement towards academics who don't write prolifically in the excerpt when she comments on those with "little ways of pretending that they are research active". One paper is not enough: "Forget it!" Nessa's take on finding voice is a departure from the individually-centred expression of voice previously

discussed. For Nessa, voice is about consistency and regularity and output. This cannot be achieved through sporadic efforts.

6.3.6 Voice as Nurturer of Voices

The predominant theme in Enda's interview is connection. Voice is the connection between the author and the reader through understanding. Enda wants to connect with what he reads and he would like readers of his essays to connect with what he writes. He talks about a bond between author and reader and adds that he would like to be able to express himself "in a way that connects with others". Extending this idea of connection, Enda's interview also touched on an aspect of the connection which relates to the writer's intentions towards readers of the article. In the excerpt below, it is possible to see his frustration as he tries to engage with academic journal articles but we also see that he questions the author's motivation and raises the notion of a divide, a kind of intellectual hierarchy where Enda, as student, feels disenfranchised:

...but that they wrote it in a way that makes them sound kind of intellectually way above the reader, that there's kind of that divide I found definitely last year anyway that you're kind of, you're reading what's being said and you're trying to decipher it. It's like a puzzle.

Enda commented that he would like the information to be clearer where "the reader feels on the same level", where the writer seeks to form a connection rather than "showing their way superior intellect through their writing". It could be argued that it takes time for a student to get acquainted with the disciplinary discourse and the style of academic writing and this of course is true. Enda is a second-year student and this argument is therefore plausible. However, Enda came across as an extremely astute and motivated student so my feeling is that his observations should not be swept aside so easily. The presence of power relations and a kind of intellectual hierarchy is in evidence here. Essentially, Enda is questioning whether the authors of the journal articles that he reads have any educational intent at all. His question raises bigger questions about the nature and purpose of academic publication. Do

authors seeking publication in academic journals consider the learning of students such as Enda?

Molly also brings up the idea of voice as educator. She describes below what it looks like when an author's writing has educational intent and also describes the alternate, when it doesn't:

What you do for your reader then is they come away saying I'm a better person for having read this. I've learned something. I'm smarter, as opposed to most academic reading where you come away saying I don't know if I understood that. What were they trying to say? Where you feel like you got a drive by or something you know. Or someone is just trying to say haha, I'm smarter than you, do you know? That alienation. So again that it makes you, you pass your fire to somebody else, your passion. And they say now I understand why this is so important or I want to go learn more about this, or I want to contribute. Voice encourages or nurtures other voices I think.

This view of voice and its potential is powerful. Molly's assessment extends the scope of voice beyond the actual writing and the reading to the learning of the reader. Voice is nurturer and educator. As previously discussed, there is a strong desire to be published in higher education today and when it happens, it is undoubtedly an achievement for any student or academic. However, it is important also to question whether this drive can perhaps eclipse the potentially educational and transformative potential of academic writing. By considering voice as nurturer of other voices, we can reflect on purpose, on the reader and upon the nature of the impact we wish to achieve with the piece of writing. Becker (1986) writes about the scholarly persona often adopted by academic writers which involves adopting "classy writing" to seem "knowledgeable and worldly" and as a way of sounding part of an elite academic community. (p.31). He explains how he consciously adopts an informal writing style which does not alienate readers but rather emphasises the similarities that exist between them. It is an approach which situates his purpose as a writer as teacher and guide. He is a writer who is not too far removed from the reader and is one who wishes to nurture their learning.

6.4 Themes

A number of themes emerged in the interviews relating to the assumptions and permissions that students and academics refer to at different stages of the academic path. I saw value in exploring these in more detail in this chapter. While some of the ideas have already cropped up in some of the discussions and stories, they are explored here as part of a broader commentary on academic writing and voice. The first theme is *Journey of a Personal Pronoun*. This theme travels the entire academic trajectory from undergraduate study to writing for publication and looks at assumption and permissions relating to the use of “I” in academic writing. The second theme is entitled *Forcing Voice and the Pressure to Publish*. It looks at the perceptions around publication for new and existing academics and asks whether these conditions and perceptions are conducive to a positive academic life and to writing practice.

6.4.1 Theme One: Journey of a Personal Pronoun

In a number of the interviews, there was a discussion about the use of the personal pronoun in academic writing. What emerged was that there is still confusion about the appropriateness of its use and reticence to use “I” or “we” because it is associated with a lack of objectivity or rigour in pockets of the academy. Interestingly, in one interview, a proponent for the use of the personal pronoun cited a study by Sword (2012) which states that in her review of sixty-six peer-reviewed journals across disciplines, she found only one journal (history) that prohibits the use of the personal pronoun in its style guidelines. However, Sword also notes that in her study she also came across many writers who are uncomfortable using the personal voice as well as many style guides that recommend against its use.

Over the course of this small study, I came across mixed views and confusion over what was acceptable or allowed. The four excerpts below explore aspects of this confusion which complicates academic writing and can, as the excerpts show, make it more onerous than it needs to be. The fourth excerpt below is taken from an interview with Molly who advocates for the use of personal pronouns. She links the

avoidance of personal pronouns to a belief that doing so makes academic texts appear more objective and academic. The third excerpt captures an alternative view from an academic staff member Adam, who talks about a limited use of the personal pronoun so as not to detract from the objectivity of the academic text. The second excerpt provides the inspiration for this section's title. Sean, a postdoctoral researcher charts his use of the personal pronoun and reveals his shifting understanding about using the personal pronoun and its appropriateness at different stages of the academic path.

The first excerpt charts the confusion of Stephen, a Master's student. He reflects on his use of the third person as a way of referring to himself in the text and during the conversation, there is a shift in his thinking. The conversation below is based around the sample writing provided by Stephen. I chose to question him on his use of "the author" in his text as a means of referring to himself. I was not surprised by this and had come across it in student assignments. What is notable in this excerpt is the impact of questioning about academic approach and challenging assumptions. There is a change from the beginning of the piece to the end as Stephen reflects and makes sense of his writing approach.

I: I was interested in a couple of things in this one and it's just around - and I've seen this convention a lot here - when you refer to yourself as 'the author'. Where did that come from?

P: Not referring to yourself in the first person, you know, 'I' and so on. There's an example of me saying 'the author'... so just another way of saying me, you know. But I guess in order to bring your own analysis or derive something from...otherwise it's just data, just passing it on in another form. So what's the value add or what's your interpretation or what's your analysis? In my opinion that's what you're being asked to do. Otherwise just throw a few books up there and say well the answer is in there.

I: Absolutely. But why, or is there a reticence or convention that you're aware of, to maybe not say 'I consider' or 'I acknowledge'?

P: We were told I think during the BBS⁷ that, not to be saying 'I' and so on. So is what you're saying that you're just getting around that by saying the author or are you saying...?

⁷ Bachelor of Business Studies

- I: *I've seen it myself and I'll be honest it's not something that I have in my own, but it seems to be something here and I just was... because you were saying 'the author' is you so it is you and it is 'I' but it seems to be, so it's kind of something that you were advised to do?*
- P: *Yeah.*
- I: *Ok.*
- P: *I mean, yeah.*
- I: *Can you remember when that came up?*
- P: *It would have been early on in first year. Not to be referring to yourself. I mean in the Master's now, I mean there's, some have mentioned it in academic writings, the skills programme we had there was not to be referring to the first person.*
- I: *They still like it there. Ok it's interesting because different subject areas would have different feelings on that. There's no hard and fast rule you see. So that's why I'm kind of... I'm picking it up because I'm coming from a different angle. And actually even within subject areas you'd have very divergent views on that, even within here. So yeah, absolutely. We'll talk about it but there's kind of a more traditional kind of approach to academic writing like that. Formal. And then a kind of a more, it's not even modern, a little bit of critical thinking kind of side or critical theory where the identity of the author is in it and why would you not call it as it is?*
- P: *Personally I'd like to. I think at this stage you want to assert yourself. I've learnt all this, I want to.*
- I: *And that's why I'm prodding you on this. I'm being a bit bold⁸ but the reason I am is because you chose the word assertiveness and that's why I'm kind of interested in whether that- I don't know - whether that works for you or is it kind of, did you not even think about it because it's just I suppose something that you've been doing all the way along?*
- P: *No. I mean, you know, I'm very conscious when I write, I want to say something here.*
- I: *'The author acknowledges there may be varying perspectives but presents the data'. So you're... it's third personing yourself.*
- P: *Yeah.*
- I: *This is not a criticism. It's just...*

⁸ The Irish connotation of "bold" means naughty rather than brave

P: Just in terms of I guess, there's a few things at play here. One is that you're conforming to the norm of not referring to 'I'. But at the same time there's a want to put forward your piece of whatever, analysis or, - in other words...

I: Experience?

P: Yeah. If it was data you looked at well the conclusion I make on this is this, you know and I want to say that but if I can't say what I want to say. It seems like actually if I think about it, there is a bit of restraint in the undergrad because you're sort of trying to, well you can't be opinionated. You've got to be this, you've got to be that, you know, and you go actually, you know, but maybe that's, there's a reason for that? I don't know what it is.

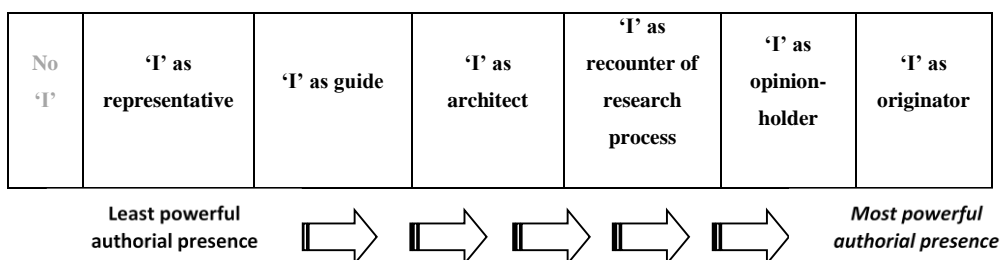
I: That's one of the things I'm looking at in this research because

P: It's a bit sort of...when I think about it it's a restriction isn't it really?

I worried that I was too strong in my prodding and perhaps by declaring my own views that I had influenced him unduly but following the interview, Stephen emailed me to say he had found the experience positive and helpful. I included an extended rather than truncated excerpt of the conversation so that my questions and role in the conversation could be seen and judged. It is clear in the piece that my own bias is present but what is also clear is that there is a value to challenging assumptions and highlighting alternative approaches to writing. It takes little explanation in the conversation. Stephen picks it up quickly and is aware of what his preference would be. This excerpt shows that conversations about writing can help students consider their positionality and develop a stronger sense of ownership of their opinions and arguments in academic writing rather than relying on conventions and guidelines that are not opening up discussion and advancing student learning.

In the next excerpt, again a conversation about the sample of writing, I asked Sean about his use of the personal pronoun and introduced him to the Tang and John's (1999) Typology of Voices⁹. The discussion of the various meanings of "I" in an

⁹



academic text prompted a longer discussion about the use of personal pronoun at different stages of study.

I: And when, I noticed that you used the personal pronoun...sometimes we don't see it. You put yourself in there. How would you describe the 'I'? Here you said, I sought to problematize....when are you comfortable using the 'I' Do you ever have a moment of 'can I say it like this or with your sociology background is it all ok?' because sometimes I find with business students that it's almost like it's not allowed nearly. There's a sense of a funny feeling about it and yet you use it very comfortably and appropriately I think.

P: Yeah. It takes a while in academia to figure out when it is appropriate to do so and in what in what setting to do so. So here it's... you're describing your experience in going about researching the topic and that's obviously a very very personal experience so in that case I think we had decided that it would be an appropriate time to use that. And you also have to look at the journal as well and see what they accept or do they see as acceptable so I guess for me that was for me was key. You are describing your personal experience of researching the topic so you can present it in that kind of language.

I: You might be interested. One of the frameworks I use- not that you need to know this but you might find it interesting- when I am looking at voice, this is just one where they have actually looked at the use of the personal pronoun and the different 'I's that you can read. So 'I' representing 'I the architect'. Sometimes you see in writing where someone is saying I will show you around my assignment or my paper and I will tell you what I am doing. It's on this kind of continuum and it's related to power. I know you are interested in power and power relations so that kind of level of authorial presence so how much of you is in your text. So when you get down here about the opinion holder and 'I the Originator' so in your PhD, you were coming up with new evidence, coming up with new hypothesis maybe you are very much in a powerful authorial position. When you are at undergrad you might tend to use 'I' but just to say 'I will conclude this paper...' It's an interesting one isn't it?

P: It is yeah, it's fascinating yeah.

I: So you know there I would say that where you say 'I problematize...' you are recounting the research process there and I am finding that people that are using 'I' but that they are comfortable putting themselves as the researcher but then less... or maybe still a bit tentative with 'I' 'I have come up with this'. And it's just interesting just as you are saying it there I feel that you are very much at that... you know, here I am as the researcher and I am presenting this process.

P: Well in a way, for me, it's come full circle so I would have been starting writing articles in undergrad so I would have started there (pointing at upper end of continuum – 'I the Originator')

I: Interesting....so you had these ideas and did they get bashed out of you? (laugh)

P: Yeah pretty much (laughing).

I: So you had to go back around and start at the end of the line? (on continuum)

P: Completely. By the Master's you are afraid to use the 'I' at all and then by PhD stage you are like OK, I know how to use this and when not to use it.

This conversation raises something new. A postdoctoral researcher reflects on his journey across the academic trajectory and introduces the idea that the personal pronoun might go on a journey of its own. Sean started with ideas and the authoritative expression of someone with opinion and ownership but recoils from this as he learns about the prevailing academic conventions. His use of personal voice re-emerges later in his doctoral study having been absent from his undergraduate and Master's writing. This raises issues of permission and power structures built within the academic pathway. From an ideological standpoint, it raises the question of when is a student allowed to express him/herself in a more forthright manner? More pragmatically, it also raises the question, do we really need to go on such a journey with our pronoun usage as part of our academic development?

The next excerpt is from a discussion with Adam, an academic staff member. He takes the view, which echoes many in the academic literature (Stapleton and Helms-Park, 2008), that it is the substance or content that is most important and not the style of the writer. He outlines his understanding of where it is appropriate to use the personal pronoun in an academic text.

P: For that paper, the voice may change depending as it evolves but it is less important than the substance. So I could re-write that in terms of third person or first person, you know, re-write and change the phraseology and grammatical structure, if, as needed. The more scientific an article, supposedly, the less of the individual is to be there. You know it's quite...less of the person becomes evident I think. In fact, the point is, in work like this ultimately that the evidence should be made avail..if the evidence is made available to scrutiny, then you can take a more objective stance towards it because presumably someone else taking the same evidence and the same

methods of analysis could presumably come up with very similar conclusions. But that said where we are drawing a discussion out and conclusions, I think that the author's voice has to come back stronger because that's more subjective. Yeah so where's there's subjectivity required or implied then you can probably use the first person or collective pronouns.

This short excerpt highlights the discomfort that exists with overly subjective academic text. The overuse of the personal pronoun can be seen as a beacon of excessive naval-gazing. Pile and Thrift (1995) criticise the excesses of researcher reflexivity in academic writing and warn that its result is that “the writer’s subject becomes object and the writer’s object slides gently away” (p.15). In this excerpt, Adam seems to have a view on the importance of the research speaking for itself without excessive intrusion of the researcher; while at the same time he acknowledges the presence of the researcher is permissible as *guide* or *recounter of the research process* and perhaps even as the *opinion-holder* that draws conclusions (see Tang and John’s 1999 continuum). What strikes me about the excerpt is that he is not sure. He uses tentative language with words such as “presumably” and “supposedly” and it feels like it is not fully resolved for him. The excerpt hints at his uncertainty over what is allowed or what might be poorly regarded by peers in terms of its rigour and objectivity. Finlay (2002) uses the metaphor of *negotiating the swamp* to describe finding the balance between researcher presence and reflexivity in academic writing. Her appraisal of what is appropriate - while not referring to the use of personal pronoun - adds a useful perspective here. She writes: “the challenge for researchers using introspection is to use personal revelation not as an end in itself but as a springboard for interpretations and more general insight” (p.215). The use of the personal pronoun is a straightforward guide to authorial presence and interpretation. The question is, why should that be a bad thing?

The final excerpt continues this discussion with another academic colleague (Molly) with extensive academic writing experience and who is a proponent of the use of the personal pronoun. The conversation begins with me asking if she has encountered any confusion over its use in the school.

P: I have. And you know I've gotten that from staff when I've done staff workshops that they think for themselves even they can't use the first person.

Now what that contributes to, is the whole I can't have a voice, that there is no 'I' or me or individual here and that we're some way separated or cut off from the human element of our research and what we're talking about. (...). It's basically these are our findings sort of you know report writing. So there's this longstanding assumption that if you put yourself, frame it in terms of a personal pronoun it makes you more objective. You get that distance and then no one can object to what you said because it's so objective you know.

This excerpt provides a sense that this reticence exists beyond the bounds of this study. The piece again touches upon the notion that removing indicators of writer presence creates a more objective text. For me, the preoccupation with writing style or indeed voice is worthwhile particularly when it helps academic writers consider their positionality in the text. The final excerpt not only captures the assumptions that exist about academic conventions and permissions but it also signals the need for more open and widespread discussion on academic writing at a local level. Sword (2012) concludes that academic writers have both options when it comes to using the personal pronoun. She suggests that “those who have long avoided adopting a more personal voice out of habit, convention or fear – perhaps because they were told by a teacher or supervisor long ago that personal pronouns sound ‘unprofessional’ or ‘unacademic’ – can relax and give *I* or *we* a whirl” (p.43). I take my cue from Sword. My observations are not to prevent those with a clear preference for not using the personal pronoun from continuing to write in the manner that they choose. However, I am advocating for choice and guidance so that assumptions are challenged and discussed rather than accepted docilely in an environment that would otherwise champion divergence and questioning.

6.4.2 Theme Two: Forcing Voice and the Pressure to Publish

This theme explores the confusion with academic writing at an individual level while also considering the wider context, that is, the conditions in which students and academics are asked to write. In a number of interviews the ideas of *rules of the game* and *rites of passage* in relation to academic writing were raised both explicitly and implicitly in the interviews. On the whole, students interviewed seemed unsure of what the rules were and went through a process of discovery, trying to figure out

their approach and what was required of them. John, for example, remarked that he had figured out what “they” (lecturers) want in the academic assignments and was happy to have reached an understanding of requirements although he occasionally liked to push the boundaries. Enda showed a curiosity that extended beyond achieving good grades in his assessment. He was trying to figure out how to integrate himself with his academic writing intuitively and without being guided to do so.

For more experienced students and academics, there were mixed views on the expectations relating to academic writing for academic publication. Ellen, as seen previously in the chapter considered academic conventions to be restrictive. By contrast, Alex viewed them as an effective means of communication within a community of practice while Nessa saw the *rules of the game* as a way of improving her writing. This section focusses specifically on academic writing for publication and examines some of the assumptions, permissions and motivations that exist in relation to the writing of journal articles.

The importance of publishing journal articles featured in a number of interviews. Sean spoke of the efforts he put in to complete academic papers in a bid to get published: “Articles, peer reviewed articles are king in academia so I mean that is something that I have to keep on top of. It’s pretty challenging”. Similarly, Anne talked about a sense of urgency in getting published as a new academic member of academic staff: “So I am really pushing myself to get a draft of a paper finished so at least I will have something out there sooner rather than later”. The interview with Nessa, which I have substantially quoted above, provides a sense of the expectations to publish for academics and doctoral students. Nessa’s interview focussed on the importance of getting published and building an academic reputation. It is an ongoing endeavour, she argued, it is the way to find your voice.

Increasingly in higher education, Nessa’s conception of voice as reputation is the voice that appears to be taking precedence over other voices. As university ranking systems give prominence to the number of citations achieved by academics, there is growing pressure for academics to reach wider audiences and have *impact* but also to publish in more prestigious journals. The enhancement of their individual reputation

enhances the university's reputation. Viewed through this lens, voice become almost contrapuntal in nature. The voice of reputation does not belong solely to the individual but also to the institution. The voice of the individual merges to become part of a systemic voice.

When the academic writing voice flows well, there are reputational rewards for the individual and the institution. It is not always so clear cut however. In the excerpt below, Ellen comments on the quest for publication both in terms of rules to be obeyed and in terms of rites of passage. She suggests that it is not an easy process because you have to figure out what is required in terms of the rules. She also suggests that even then it is not so straightforward as there are different rules for those who are beginning and those with established reputations:

You have to stick within the...there's a very strict structure in terms of publishing papers. It's not an easy process so you really have to stick the head down to get your work published, you need to stick with what's required of you. That said, people that are published all over the place, seem to get away with it, later on in their careers, you know. It seems to be a ladder, you know because they seem to be able to write papers where you go hang on if I wrote this I wouldn't get published!

Ellen's excerpt suggests that the rules of the game are not only difficult to master in the first place but that there are different rules. The suggestion implicit here is that at different stages in the academic trajectory, there are particular rites of passage. Gaining a foothold, that is, an understanding of the rules of the game is one rite of passage but then there is the realisation that certain voices are perhaps privileged and for these voices, the rules may not apply in the same way. Ellen's view might well be challenged. Publishing journals provide detailed style guides and outline their interests so that it is clear what their requirements are. However, it is worthwhile to ponder her impressions. These are the impressions of a doctoral student trying to get published. She might well forget that she felt this way when, in time, she has gained her foothold and mastered the game, but her observations and the challenges she meets are nonetheless real now.

In another interview, Molly focuses on other challenges in relation to publication where academics have understood the rules of the game but feel pressure rather than pleasure in writing:

I think that the pressure is that they don't like it you know. I don't think there's any joy there. Whether they would recognise that or state it publicly, but it's really no fun the process. You write this dry, dreary material and then you send it off and it's a long process and it's time consuming and there's no guarantee of how it's ever going to be received. I mean you could write something that you think is wonderful and somebody else doesn't.(...) I mean they're always told play it safe and do like everyone else does but really I think if everybody writes like that the way to distinguish yourself is to not write like that.

Molly presents an almost dystopian view of academic writing. The absence of words such as creativity, passion and pleasure is palpable in her appraisal. Instead, she talks of pressure, producing dry, dreary material which is safe and which conforms. The pressure felt is the pressure to build up publications and the question raised by this is whether exertions under these conditions will produce good writing. If, as Molly asserts elsewhere, people are just “going through the motions”, can we have an expectation of exciting and thought-provoking publications? For some people, yes. These pressures might get them to the writing table. Indeed many creative writers need focus and pressure to write habitually. In his memoir “On Writing”, Stephen King suggests discipline as an important determinant of prolific writing. On the other hand, he is also adamant that the conditions for writing should be conducive and argues that fear is at the root of most bad writing. Perhaps it is not reasonable to think that external pressures to publish will work for all. Perhaps we should question whether passion still has a place in academic writing and if so, whether excessive focus on metrics such as citations actually diminish the passion and quell the creativity and motivation?

Questions about academic writing practices in higher education traverse the actual writing and occupy spaces in all corners of the higher education landscape. They raise bigger issues that cannot be dealt with in this thesis but equally cannot be ignored. They summon up issues relating to the marketisation of higher education and the emphasis on efficiency and productivity (see Meek, 2000). They remind us

of the questions raised by Ball (2003) when he talked about the terrors of performativity and schizophrenic value system “where judgement and authenticity within practices are sacrificed for impressions and performance” (p.221). These questions summon up prior discussions about the nature of knowledge in a knowledge society and suggest the realisation of Lyotard’s (1979/1984) prediction of the commodification of knowledge:

Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value’. (p.4)

In her interview, Nessa described the academic’s role as comprising research, teaching and administrative duties. The writing is not a surprise but perhaps the conditions and competitive aspect of academic writing is daunting for some emerging academics who need more space and time to develop their research interest, their passion and their voice.

Elsewhere in her interview, Molly describes the alternative, the writing that flows and is not exhorted by performative metrics:

But I think if you write to the truth, so write something you care about, write something you’re passionate about and that’s where I think the loss is, that we’re getting, people move away from what they really are interested in.(...)And to write something you feel passionate about and you care about. If you are passionate about your work and it’s the truth it will show on the page and you’ll have a reader hooked and they’ll say yes, this is important.

In this view, the motivation to write is the quest for knowledge and the passion to share it. It is intrinsic rather than extrinsic and it is the nature of this motivation that is the key issue. There is space for passion in higher education but for some academics, this has to be developed more incrementally. Perhaps the message to emerging academics especially should be more focussed on the development of their passion rather than the development of a list of publications. We have to question how this can be achieved however, when the focus on achieving funding and recognition prevails.

Like Molly, Ellen also outlined her vision for a more favourable environment for academic writing. She wants a space that privileges discussion over perfection and interaction over convention. In the excerpt below, she invokes the image of the past salons of the Enlightenment where members of a scholarly community debated and conversed for the sake of knowledge. Ellen's excerpt concludes this section and conjures up a space to grow, to think and to even fail a little, a space that perhaps has been diminished in the current academic landscape:

So I think, I don't know, I always kind of think that if I was alive in the eighteenth century, I'd be allowed write whatever I like, kind a thing you know. People would listen to me and critique me and tell me I'm wrong and that's fine. I don't mind being told I'm wrong now, I've gotten used to that but it's being allowed to be wrong maybe. It's being allowed to express your ideas a little bit more and be wrong. That I think is missing from today's academic priorities. We are so focussed on getting everything right on the page for the peer review that we're not allowed express ideas and thoughts about things and delve into things enough that they can be authentic to me.

Chapter 7

Why Voice Matters

7.1 Reflecting on the Process

The aims of this research were to explore the stories and concepts of voice across different stages of the academic trajectory. The research was conducted in a college of business situated within a leading Irish research-intensive university. Through a review of existing literature on voice and academic writing and through interviews with eleven people from the two business schools within the college, I have brought together a range of interpretations and definitions which show voice to be a complex, multi-layered but also an important and useful concept.

The research was conducted using a narrative approach which generated a vast body of data comprising stories about voice as well as discussions on what voice means in relation to academic writing. Using a narrative approach also provided the opportunity to consider the voices of the actual research process too. It provided a platform to hear participant voices in their stories and to hear their ideas in the discussions. It also permitted the inclusion of my researcher voice through the field notes and through my commentary and analysis of the findings which brought the project into the three-dimensional research space as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

As a result of this research process, I developed a far greater appreciation of what voice can mean. By exploring voice in all its complexity, different ideas of its value in higher education emerged. Voice has applicability to all stages of the academic trajectory that moves it beyond its more obvious conception relating to writer style. It offers ways to develop epistemological understanding, to harness writer opinion and to help students develop a deeper understanding of cultural and historical influences in texts. It presents the opportunity for students and academics alike to develop greater self-awareness in and through their writing, considering not just their approach but also their positionality and their representation of themselves in their writing. Finally, voice offers ways to help students and academics to question their

assumptions about writing. Considering voice and reflecting on their writing and their role as writer, can help them to move into a space where they can feel more empowered and more authoritative.

My original idea for this project centred on the idea of *finding voice* in academic writing and while the scope and focus of the project evolved in the early stages of planning, in a way, it still retained a sense of finding voice at its core. In the research of the literature I found many new voice meanings and metaphors. In the interviews, I encountered many more definitions of voice. I found voice by opening up this research to permit all the interpretations and perspectives that came my way and it was enlightening. My intention is that by reading this thesis you have had the opportunity to find voice meanings that you had not previously considered, and that you also see the value and potential for voice in higher education.

7.2 Contribution

Referring to the array of meanings of voice and its definitional ambiguity, Tardy (2012) writes that “providing an overview to the concept of voice is no mean feat” (p.34). It is true that navigating the literature on voice is onerous and confusing at times. It crosses over a vast terrain of literature and theoretical frameworks. Understanding voice demands that you go wide and deep. This thesis adds to the array of meanings and existing literature but it does so in ways that help understanding rather than complicating it further. It does this in two ways. Firstly, it offers new definitions and new dimensions of voice. For example, the idea of voice as the *Sociological Imagination* had not come up in my reading of the literature. In his interview, Sean related how he saw voice as the vehicle where he could relate his personal experiences to wider society. It was about having something to say. Similarly, the idea of voice as *Nurturer of other Voices* was a new interpretation of the idea of voice connecting the writer and the reader. Molly described voice as nurturer in terms of educational intent, where it inspires and encourages other voices. She related that this voice would seek to develop and empower others: “What you do for your reader then is they come away saying I’m a better person for having read this. I’ve learned something”. This idea for voice is powerful and inspirational. It

sets out a different type of driver for academic writers and an uncomplicated conception of impact – both of which deserve greater attention.

Secondly, the thesis adds to the existing literature through its treatments and discussion of the existing meanings. The abstract concepts of voice come to life through the interviews as the participants offer their lived perspectives. Through stories and discussions we unpack the meanings of voice in a way that is not possible through theory alone. For example, the idea of voice as authority in the literature refers to the influence and assurance of a writer who is expert in his/her discipline. In the interview with Marie, she infuses the idea of authority with power relations. When a lecturer helped her with her understanding and encouraged her criticality, she noted that the result was that: “He lost his authority. He lost his power because I realised he was just a human being, he wasn’t this authoritative figure who was the be all and end all and I started to argue with some of his ideas in my own head”. Similarly, Enda’s interview brings to life the importance of voice as connection between writer and reader. He questions the intellectual hierarchy and the motivations of the writer noting “but they wrote it in a way that makes them sound kind of intellectually way above the reader”. In the literature, Elbow’s (2009) concept of voice as resonance is quite difficult to grasp but Enda’s story gives life and meaning to this concept of resonance as he describes what it feels like when it is absent.

The thesis also has further contribution to make in addition to the understanding of what voice is and this relates to what voice does. During the research phase, I began to appreciate that my research’s contribution would come from the stories and discussions about voice and writing - where the perspectives and experiences of people previously unheard could now be heard. In addition, I saw that the interview process itself had an intrinsic value for the participants because it provided an opportunity for them to reflect upon voice and writing in a way that many found beneficial and, in some cases, edifying.

Voice invites reflection. It provides the opportunity for us individually to think about our own writing practice and our own sense of voice. It invites us as educational practitioners to consider our pedagogical practices and how they might impact on our

students' voices. Voice also invites us to be critically active – to evaluate and interrogate the educational environment in which we work and perhaps consider whether there are opportunities in the curriculum or the classroom where we might better support the development of students as writers. It invites us to question on a bigger scale too. We can evaluate policies and suppositions. We might, for example, re-examine our conceptions of success in relation to academic writing where there seems to be more emphasis on output than on the process of learning. We might review how and why people write in higher education today and evaluate the governing conditions and conventions from a potentially different perspective, that is, a voice perspective.

This thesis also has potential to contribute to future research. There is potential for longitudinal research tracking individuals' academic development and understanding of voice over their academic journey. While this research provides a snapshot, a longer-term project with repeated engagement with participants could examine, at individual level, how writing practice, perspectives and academic identity develop over time.

There was a particular richness in the interviews with the participants at doctoral and postdoctoral stages in this research and I believe that there is great potential here for more detailed study of academic writing and academic life at this transition stage between graduate student and academic. Ivanic and Camps (2001) highlight the importance of this stage of transition in terms of identity development. They argue that graduate students are at an intersection in the academic community which shapes their perception of identity within the academic community. Like Ivanic and Camps, I can see potential for this research because I think that students at this juncture have a clear view of the pathway to graduate study as well as the pathway beyond and that they have valuable insights about academic writing life. They are not so removed from undergraduate and postgraduate study that they forget what it is like not to have disciplinary or epistemological knowledge. They can remember their route to learning and potentially their struggles and they can recount how this felt. Equally, they have aspirations to continue on the academic path and so provide a particular perspective on expectations. Voice provides a unique opportunity to open up conversations with graduates about their writing and sense of writer identity and

can thus provide greater understanding of the writing journey across the academic trajectory.

Finally, I think there is potential value in researching voice conversations (discussed below) as an educational practice. This could be an action research project whereby a lecturer or dissertation supervisor works to develop a structure for these conversations and evaluates their impact. Narrative inquiry and questions can initiate this process but there is scope for better understanding on how these conversations might be developed and shared across the academic community. The next section focusses on specific ideas for integrating voice with current educational practice. These ideas can also be developed and perhaps generate more. With voice, there is so much potential.

7.3 Ideas and Recommendations

7.3.1 Acknowledge the Writer in the Writing

Acknowledging the writer in the writing relates to facilitating more discussion on identity in academic writing and allowing writers more opportunity to assert their own presence in their texts. I am no trailblazer here. There has been significant literature on the importance of discussing identity in academic writing (Ivanic, 1998; Lea and Street, 1998; Ivanic and Camps, 2001; Fernsten and Reda, 2011) which has highlighted the importance of acknowledging writer presence in academic writing. Ivanic (1998) for example, suggested that an important step in overcoming the difficulties that students have with academic writing would be to recognise that it is not merely an issue of communication but rather one of self-representation.

As seen in this research, many students were trying to grapple with identity issues but they were doing so in isolation and furthermore, they were doing so somewhat blindsided, that is, they were trying to understand academic rules or conventions without seeing them in relation to identity. There is a missed opportunity here. By understanding their questions from an identity perspective, the participants might have been able to navigate some of their challenges and worries more seamlessly and

more meaningfully. For example, one of the themes discussed in the findings related to a reticence to use the personal pronoun in academic writing as if doing so would betray the objectivity of the piece. In his interview, Stephen saw avoiding the personal pronoun as a matter of convention, a rule that was established during his degree that he would carry through his Master's. He related that he was not allowed to use "I" but curiously was advised to refer to himself in the third person as "the author". Sword (2012) argues that when we "muzzle" the personal voice, we risk subverting the purpose of researchers which is to foster change by communicating in the most effective and persuasive way possible (p.44). I would argue that this extends to students too. We should be encouraging students to communicate as effectively and persuasively as possible. By muzzling their personal voice, we are hampering them instead of than enabling them. By advising them to refer to themselves in the third person, we are also confusing them.

Identity questions emerged in other forms and at other stages of academic learning too. Ellen, a doctoral student, spoke of her frustration that she could not take ownership of her ideas in her thesis. While recognising the boundaries and the need to restrain her "meandering thoughts", she also wished had had "more leeway" to add her own ideas rather than relying so heavily on citing others' work. Her interview featured frequent references to *battle*, *frustration*, *arguments* and *struggle* in relation to her efforts to be allowed incorporate her personal perspective. She talked of a "hierarchical structure that you have to conform to". My impression was that Ellen felt thwarted by her supervisor and by the abiding conventions of her discipline. The questions she raised as part of her doctoral process were, in essence, questions about identity but they were being responded to with answers about academic conventions.

Similarly, Enda, an undergraduate participant explained how he found it difficult to feel a connection to his previous academic assignments where he had tried to write "academically". Elbow (2007) argued that writing with voice, that is, writing imbued with the individual consciousness of the writer, is more effective at carrying and conveying meaning. Without any knowledge of Elbow or the expressivist movement, Enda was trying to feel a sense of ownership and pride in what he had written. He was trying to acknowledge the writer in the writing. However, he was

working this out in isolation and, at the time of interview, he was not sure how this new approach to his assignments would be graded.

In a different part of his interview, Enda told a story about his fear of plagiarism in which he explained the measures that he and his classmates took to include citations in their assignments (retrospectively finding quotes for their ideas) and related their anxiety about being caught out plagiarising unintentionally. The idea of such fear among first year students is worrying. Thinking of students going to such lengths is not only a waste of their time and energy but it is also a waste of a valuable learning opportunity where they could be engaging with their lecturers on ways to work more confidently with the literature. Instead of trying to find ways of disguising their identity and ideas, students in their first year in college should be offered opportunities to discuss how they can develop their ideas and build their familiarity with the disciplinary discourse. They should be learning to integrate their thoughts with existing literature – what Whitney (2011) calls situating their voices among others. They should be acknowledging and not hiding the writer in their texts.

These challenges are not merely issues of communication. As matters of identity and voice they should be handled as matters of identity and as matters of voice which requires a move away from supporting the more technical aspects of writing. Arguments about academic convention will not satisfactorily answer questions about identity. Sword (2012) maintains that a convention “is not a compulsion” (p.22). I agree and I think that we should consider some latitude here for students at all stages of the academic trajectory to explore and question voice. I am not talking about dropping standards of writing, I am talking about raising them. If we want students to develop their writing in a way that is more than imitation, if we want students to develop their capacity to discuss and critically analyse academic texts, then we should allow the space for the writer in the writing. To do this, we need to provide the supports. My second recommendation offers one way of supporting this. It suggests that voice conversations provide an invaluable opportunity to support the awareness of voice and identity in academic writing.

7.3.2 Have Conversations about Voice

Having a conversation about voice and academic writing has benefits at all stages of the academic trajectory. A number of the participants that took part in this study related how much they had enjoyed the interview and how helpful they had found discussing their writing and thinking about voice. In narrative research, there is an understanding that through the story and questions, the participant *makes meaning* and can understand events in a new way as a result of the narrative interview. This occurred for many of the participants prompting them to consider their writing and voice in ways that they had not done previously.

In addition to this, all participants offered distinctive definitions for voice. As a concept, voice is complex and ambiguous and while initially challenging, this is also its strength. The very process of teasing out its different meanings had an impact on the participants. They had to consider what they meant by voice and then how or if it was reflected in their writing. The interviews involved discussions about a sample of each participant's writing. Talking about their writing in such a focussed way enabled the participants to locate and articulate feelings and/or frustrations relating to their writing that had not been discussed before. Consequently, they were able to consider their writing and their approach in a new light – reflecting on their writing choices, assumptions and writing habits. The conversation opened up opportunities for self-development which were immediately apparent (see interview excerpt with Stephen on using personal pronoun in previous chapter).

What emerged in this study was the impact of conversation and my contention here is that having conversations about voice will be the most powerful way to engage with individuals and to maximise the understanding and potential impact of voice and identity. Within higher education and society in general, there is increasing inclination towards self-help resources where we are directed to a book or an online guide to find out what to do. It is tempting to think that a quick guide on voice might do the job but I think that discussions will have far greater potency. Through group work or dialogue, views can be explored and challenged. In a classroom situation, hearing the different interpretations of other students could help excavate voice's complex layers. Understanding that other students experience challenges with

academic writing might also pave the way for fruitful and honest engagement which ultimately helps students to learn and feel supported. Wingate (2007) sees an important aspect of student learning in university as *learning to learn*. This involves developing students' "epistemological access, making them independent learners and making them competent in constructing knowledge in their discipline" (p.403). She adds that this would involve changes in both learning habits and conceptions of knowledge for most students. Voice can provide a means to opening up such conversations in the classroom. Wingate (2006) and Lea and Stierer (2000) argue for the importance of supporting academic writing from within the discipline where it can facilitate an understanding of the culture and positioning of individual academic disciplines. I think their reasoning applies to conversations about voice too. While concepts of voice could be usefully discussed in generic terms and offered by a centralised academic support resource, discussing it from within the discipline would have more impact. It could, for example, be part of the lecture or tutorial, part of an informal interaction between student and teacher, part of a conversation between supervisor and student and likewise a conversation between experienced academic writer and novice. Simply put, voice conversations help answer some of the questions that academic writers have about writing.

Hyland (2009) talks about the expressivist movement in writing and describes it as an approach whereby "writing is learnt, not taught, and the teacher's role is to be non-directive and facilitating, providing writers with the space to make their own meanings through an encouraging, positive, cooperative environment with minimal interference" (p.19). Notwithstanding the criticisms of the expressivist approach and the charges of naiveté, I think that we should not shy away from its ideas without considering the opportunities that it affords. There is something to learn from the expressivist approach about providing space for learning and space for developing an appreciation of voice. This is not merely about sessions in freewriting. This is about having more layered conversations about voice, for example about voice in text whereby the academic writer comes to recognise the nuances of voice and learns about some of the identity, socio-historic and ideological dimensions of writing too. Small steps can make big headway where voice is concerned. The first step is to acknowledge its presence and the second is to allow the conversations to unfold.

7.3.3 Privilege the Process of Writing

In an already busy environment with an already crowded curriculum, it is reasonable to ask where the time to have these conversations is. Irrespective of these pressures I am suggesting that it is important to find the space for voice conversations. Furthermore, I am also recommending that some space and time be afforded to privileging the writing process at certain junctures in an individual's academic development. Privileging the writing process means occasionally stepping away from the curriculum content and relinquishing some of the focus on outcomes where academic writing is concerned. Prosser and Webb (1994) discuss the process of undergraduate essay writing as a means of cultural initiation as well as an important opportunity to learn what questions to ask. Coffin *et al.* (2003) see the purpose of writing not only as a means of assessment but as a process of learning and as a means of entering particular *disciplinary communities*. Looking beyond writing as assessment means considering the writing process as a valuable learning occasion in its own right that does not always need to be driven by outcome measurement. It means allowing some space and time for informal, unmeasured learning for students and academics so they might come to terms with academic writing requirements and have some opportunities to develop their writing approach and understand the discourse of their disciplines.

Habermas (1981/1987) writes about the rise of bureaucracy and describe how the *System* – essentially controls, tangible measures and defined procedures – has begun colonising the *Lifeworld* (the everyday, unregulated part of our lives where mutual understanding and informal meaning provides our direction). He refers to the lifeworld within Education and outlines how it is being colonised by the system through measurements, market-like strategies and political agenda. Others have written about the infiltration of standards and controls in higher education and their impact. Ball (2003) criticises the rising culture of performativity in higher education while Clegg (2009) bemoans the “decline in collegial governance with moves towards managerialism” (p. 406). I don't think it too far a leap to think about academic writing from this standpoint too. Where academic writing is concerned, this shift towards measuring outcomes has colonised some of the space and time previously placed on informal and/or intangible learning and thinking. If we return

once more to Ellen's interview, we see a contrast between her sense of frustration with academic writing with what she values and enjoys about it: "I enjoy writing when I'm not, again stuck to somebody else's work so it's my meandering writing I mean I just love sitting there writing through stuff". Ellen values the space for her *meandering thoughts* and her *meandering writing* where she works through her ideas. The process is important and the space to enjoy this is important. Students and academics need the space to meander before being shut down. Learning does not need to be measured to exist.

The findings in this thesis showed frustrations with the system and identified some institutional constraints (*voice silencers*) in the thematic analysis in the findings chapter. For students, we saw evidence of strategic approach in academic writing and how the whole focus of writing was shaped by the achievement of measurable outcomes - grades. By Year 4 of the programme, John explained how he had moved into a mode of working which was focussed on getting the grades by considering what the lecturers ("they") want. At one point of the interview, he referred to his essay as a "product." Enda also spoke of this and related that one of the challenges of first year was "always thinking what does the person correcting this want".

It is evident too beyond the students. The prominence of academic output is also a reality for academic staff. Anne, a new academic staff member talked about her anxiety about getting published sooner rather than later. She also talked about her first experience of getting an article published from her doctoral thesis where her supervisor, keen that she would get published, had "tidied" up her writing to such an extent that she didn't feel it was hers anymore. In another interview, Molly was frank about the result of the emphasis on getting published and commented: "I think that the pressure is that they don't like it you know. I don't think there's any joy there. Whether they would recognise that or state it publicly, but it's really no fun the process".

Molly raises an important point - that for some, there is no pleasure in the writing process. Lamott (1994) writes "the act of writing turns out to be its own reward" (p.xxvi). I am suggesting here that we can learn from some of the literature about creative writing and allow the space for writing to be a more rewarding and

enjoyable endeavour. If we are writing purely for extrinsic rewards, we are potentially losing out on the opportunity for the intrinsic gratification that can come from any creative process. For students, this could mean the integration of more writing support and conversations about writing from within the discipline so they can feel empowered in their writing rather than feel daunted by a task that they don't always understand. Fernsten and Reda (2011) maintain that when students get help to understand their identity in writing, their approach to writing and their enjoyment of writing is enhanced. They note: "when they see themselves as writers, they act like writers" (p.180).

For academics, the same applies. While they are more experienced, they also need the space to grow into their role as expert and to write with purpose that is aligned to this identity. Perhaps if academic writing could return to its roots where it is driven by a passion to share knowledge, the engagement with writing might be different. Perhaps if academic writing were shaped by educational intent rather than performative indicators, the pleasure and fulfilment, undoubtedly experienced by some academics could again be realised by all. Cardinal John Henry Newman (1852) sets out the purpose of education and in the excerpt below, the role of academic writing is outlined as part of his vision in *The Idea of University*.

It is the education which gives a man a clear, conscious view of their own opinions and judgements, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them." (From Discourse 7. Newman, J.H, 1852)

This view of education, far from being outdated, is more relevant than ever. It is perhaps all the more poignant here since Newman actually established the university where this research was conducted. My notion of space and time for developing judgements and expressing them with eloquence is really only a reiteration of his vision for learning. We have to reconsider some of the priorities of higher education. We have to take the time and create the space to step off the content and the outcomes and to talk about the learning. Not doing this is doing an injustice to students, to ourselves and the idea of university.

7.4 Final Thoughts

The stories and discussions about voice in this thesis speak of the circumstances in which people write in higher education at different stages of the academic trajectory. While the findings are particular to a small cohort of people studying and writing in a college of business in Ireland, the potential learning from reflecting on these findings can be more universally applied. When Riessman (2008) speaks about the generalisability of narrative research, she comments that “inference is of a different kind” (p.13). The potential for this research lies in these *inferences* and ultimately in the openness of readers to reflect on these stories and to allow themselves enter the perspectives of the narrators.

In addition to the stories, this thesis has also shown that voice raises important questions. The questions invite us to consider practices through a different lens offering a distinctive opportunity to learn more and to challenge our assumptions where teaching, assessment and writing for publication are concerned. Speaking about the interview process, some participants related that they had never been asked such questions previously and that they had enjoyed and valued the opportunity to have such a discussion. Other participants felt an even greater impact relating that the discussion had shifted their thinking about writing. The very act of discussing their writing and their voice made a difference and this occurred with only a little investment of time. It is not naïve to think that this approach could be replicated elsewhere in the university - in classrooms, supervisory tutorials or staff workshops - and that it could accomplish something worthwhile. All we have to do is to consider voice, to start asking the questions and to let the conversations happen.

Finally, as well as raising questions, voice also provides solutions. Bowden (1995) talks about the value of voice and notes “voice helps writers conceptualize some of the intangibles of writing, helping to make concrete such abstractions as meaning, power, liveliness, honesty” (p.186). There is great potential for voice to support and enhance the process of writing and thereby support the development of students and academic staff at all stages of the academic trajectory. Hyland (2013) challenges the view that academic writing is peripheral to the more “serious aspects of university

life”. He sees academic writing as “central to constructing knowledge, educating students and negotiating a professional academic career” (p.53). Voice provides a pathway to enhance academic writing. It provides a pathway to explore and improve how students construct their knowledge, how they learn and how researchers and academics negotiate the writing requirement of their role.

This thesis has shown that voice has stories to tell, that voice raises important questions and that voice provides solutions. This is why voice matters.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

STRUCTURE:

- Your Writing (past and present)
- On Voice (perceptions of voice / own voice in writing)
- On Writing at University (perceptions of expectations, conventions etc)

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Covering what participant is currently doing, where they did their studies, what studies etc.

How important is academic writing to you in your current situation (i.e. as student or academic staff)?

How often do you write and what do you write?

What aspects of writing a paper do you enjoy and what aspects do you not enjoy?

YOUR WRITING

Tell me about your writing when you started university/ started MA / started doctoral studies?

Can you think of a time(s) or experience that was influential in your academic studies/ career in relation to your writing? Something that might have changed your understanding or opinion/shaped your writing practice?

Can you recollect a time when you were writing a paper which had an impact on you or perhaps changed your approach to writing?

Can you think about an event / learning / ideas / people / that influenced the way you write?

What “aha” moments (if any) do you remember as you developed your writing or your understanding of requirements?

What differences (if any) can you describe about the actual writing (product) and your approach (process) – then and now?

Think about you in a few years' time, what kind of writing (if any) would you like to be doing? What improvements to your writing or achievements would you like to see?

What role do you see for academic writing in your career in the future?

Tell me about the sample of writing you provided and why you chose it. Talk me through the process of putting it together?

Can you remember what or how you got the idea to do the paper?

Can you describe what aspects of this process did you enjoy and what posed a challenge?

How do you feel about it now?

What does it say about you? / Thinking of you and who you are, how much of 'yourself' is in your academic writing?

ON VOICE

What is your understanding of voice?

How do you see voice relating to academic writing?

Tell me what comes to mind if I ask you to consider *your voice* in your academic writing?

Do you think voice is important? Do you ever consider it when you write?

What can I learn about you in your academic writing?

Some Questions on voice metaphors using the wordle:

What metaphors jump out at you?

(As appropriate, explain some of the metaphors and ask again, Which metaphors jump out - that you agree with or indeed might make you disagree?)

Considering the writing stories you discussed earlier, how and where does voice relate to these stories? Can you distinguish any of the voice metaphors?

Going back to your sample of writing, do you think your voice is evident here? If not, why not?

What does this piece of writing say about you / your academic writing say about you?

Does this still apply now?

Some questions on the style of the writing sample for example: use of personal pronoun or use of passive for example, use of quotation or paraphrasing...(will depend on each text but the idea will be to stimulate discussion about voice)

ON WRITING AT UNIVERSITY

What do you think constitutes good academic writing – for students & for academic staff?

What if any are the differences?

In relation to writing here in UCD and also in the Business School, what would you say are the main expectations for students/ staff? (This question to be asked to all. For staff & post docs ask about expectations for own writing and those for students)

If you have studied elsewhere, tell me about the writing conventions or expectations here at the School and in relation to your previous institution(s)?

What expectations do you perceive (e.g- for students in terms of assignments – i.e. grading or tutor expectations / for staff peer review, publication expectations, research pressures) as most influential/powerful?

Is **voice** important in HE? / Do you think voice or an understanding of voice has a role in developing academic writing?

Having looked at the different metaphors for voice, what *voice* do you think is important for students in higher education?

What voice is important for graduate students and academic staff?

Tell me about your experience of writing here in UCD or how your writing has evolved to meet expectations.

For Postgraduate students and Post-Docs:

As you moved into postgraduate study, what differences (if any) do you remember between writing at undergraduate level?

For Academic Staff:

Think about your own academic career development from undergraduate study to present. What differences in your writing can you remember?

For undergraduates: What would you say are the main differences between writing at school and university?

Tell me about what you think is important in relation to writing at university?

Tell me about how you think the university helps students to develop their writing? /

What helped you to develop your writing while in university?

Part of my study is to look at whether a trajectory of the development of voice exists in university. What do you think about this? What differences (if any) do you see at the different stages?

On the future of learning and academic writing:

What changes do you see as significant in the direction of higher education learning?

What, if any do you see as important in how we consider the role of academic writing or voice within the context of these changes?

Appendix 2: **Abridged Version of Field Notes Observations for Pilot Interviews**

What worked & Key Reflections for Future Interviews

Pilot 1

- Questions about recollecting academic writing work. It is important to draw upon past experiences and to question about important learning or moments. What is really interesting is that stories about academic writing contain personal insights. The first story was about doing a personal piece of writing at undergraduate level and the outcome of it. The second story was about struggling at MA level to deal with uncertainty and the lack of “facts”. What was amazing to see was how the participant connected things and thought about these events in a different way to before because of the questions I asked.
- Some of the questions about the university context fall naturally in the discussion about academic writing. While I hadn’t imagined that I would stick rigidly to my questions as if they were a list (and I didn’t at all), I can see that I should amalgamate the two sections. Question about writing will encompass the personal and the contextual naturally. While for the moment, I can keep the sections separate in my prompts, I can allow the stories to weave in naturally. I need to be more familiar with the questions but I think another pilot will help. Also I realised that I was more comfortable taking the role of interviewer without relying heavily on a script. My natural inclination is towards a conversation so this works well for narrative.
- The voice wordle works and I think it is necessary. The concepts of voice are too abstract and there are too many layers to expect someone to discuss it from nothing. What worked well was that I asked the participant what she thought voice meant **before** introducing the wordle. She gave her thoughts and then I introduced the wordle and asked her to talk about what jumped out. This worked well. I then discussed some of the metaphors and asked again what resonated and why. This made it a conversation about voice and I was sharing some of the reading I had done and talked a little about what resonated with me. She commented afterwards that it helped the way I grouped the different metaphors into fields of thought (Expressivism, Post-Structuralist thinking etc.) What I did not do and have now learned to do (**NB!**) was to go back to the two writing stories she had shared earlier and to explore in them again through the metaphors of voice. Both stories had distinct elements of voice but I didn’t think of this until the interview was over. This is a key learning for subsequent interviews. After the interview I suggested this to the participant and she said it would have

been interesting. In a conversation (post interview), she enjoyed re-visiting the stories and considering voice in them.

- The interview took over an hour and this was without discussing a piece of writing so I need to consider time. It may be important to ask participants for an hour to an hour and half.
- It also reminded me of a growing suspicion that my title for my project needs amending. I am actually focussing on perspectives on voice and not distinctly on development and discovery. For the research, I will present the research with the following working title: *Perspectives on Voice in University Academic Writing*
- My last point (which I wrote in my Field Notes copy) was really a reflection on the richness of the data and the amount and breadth of information to be covered / discovered which I wrote on the bus after the interview. It may be something I include as a reflection in the thesis if appropriate at a later date:

“Voice is a really interesting and insightful way to look at writing but also at the story of students and the story of education”.

Pilot 2

- I am wondering if it is still OK if questions don't stimulate stories. There were detailed accounts but not a story. One of the texts I read suggested this was a failure in the questions and yet with another person, they seamlessly opened up stories. My feeling is that there is an element of personal style of communication here.
- Overall, this interview was really worthwhile. It felt less like a narrative interview but possibly gave me an insight into how interviews might be with students. The concept of voice is tricky to question but the wordle does help. Perhaps, with students, we will focus on writing more than voice?
- What's good is that I feel I am OK with improvising the questions as I go along. I will keep the sheet with me as a help but I am not reliant on it and I go with what is presented. I think the first questions are important and I need to try and engage recollections and memories to encourage narratives.
- I am not sure how the writing sample works. In this interview, it did not raise new information but it did serve to show a writing approach and reinforced the sense of a distant voice. I think it will depend on each interview. My approach is to offer each participant the choice and to go with it. The interview is not dependent on the sample but it may be interesting in some situations.

Appendix 3

Information about UCD College of Business

The following information provides an overview of the UCD College of Business and its two main schools, the Quinn School of Business and the Smurfit Graduate School. The participants in this research were either students or staff members in one or both of these schools. The information has been collected from the websites and by contacting the marketing team in the Quinn School of Business. Further information about the university and the College of Business is available from the following websites:

www.ucd.ie

<http://www.ucd.ie/business/>

www.ucd/quinn

www.smurfitschool.ie

University College Dublin (UCD)

Founded in 1854 by Cardinal John Henry Newman, UCD is Ireland's largest university with 33,000 students. Approximately 25% of the student cohort comprises graduate students. In 2015, it was ranked as 176 in the World Higher Education University Rankings. UCD is a research-intensive university and also positions itself as Ireland's leading global university.

About the College of Business

The College of Business comprises the Quinn Undergraduate School of Business and the Smurfit Graduate School. The Quinn School is based on the UCD campus and has 1,850 students. The undergraduate courses offered by the Quinn School of Business include the following: Bachelor of Commerce, Bachelor of Commerce

International, BSc in Economics & Finance, BSc in Data Analytics and Bachelor of Business & Law.



Entrance of Quinn School of Business

The Smurfit School is based on a separate campus about a mile from the main UCD campus where the Quinn school is based. The Smurfit School offers a range of Master's programmes in a range of business areas such as Accountancy, Finance, Marketing, HR and Entrepreneurship. It also offers PhD programmes and a range of shorter accredited executive development programmes. The MBA programme is the highest ranking MBA in Ireland as is ranked as 73rd in the world rankings.



Smurfit School of Business

Appendix 4

Ethics Approval from University of Sheffield



11/12/2014

Ita Kennelly
School of Education

Dear Ita

PROJECT TITLE: On Finding Voice: Perspectives on the discovery and development of voice in writing.

APPLICATION: Reference Number 002101

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 26/11/2014 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will provide the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 002101 (dated 15/11/2014).
- Participant information sheet 003303 (02/11/2014)
- Participant consent form 003499 (15/11/2014)

If during the course of the project you need to deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Professor Daniel Goodley
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Appendix 5

Ethics Exemption Approval from UCD

Dear Ita

Thank you for notifying the Human Research Ethics Committee - Sciences (HREC-LS) of your declaration that you are exempt from a full ethical review. Should the nature of your research change and thereby alter your exempt status you will need to submit an application form for full ethical review. Please note for future correspondence regarding this study and its exemption that your Research Ethics Exemption Reference Number (REERN) is: **HS-E-14-120-Kennelly**. **This exemption from full ethical review is being accepted by the Office of Research Ethics on the condition that you observe the following:**

- **Access to UCD Students:** *(if applicable)* Researchers requesting permission to access students in one UCD School only must seek approval from the Head of the School before data collection begins. Should you require access to students in an additional school you should also seek the approval from the relevant Head of School. Please note that any campus-wide surveys are subject to approval from the University Student Survey Board (USSB) and that you should contact this office again if required. *[I have received a copy of approval from the Head of School of Business – no further action is required]*
- **External REC Approval and/or Permission to Access/Recruit Human Participants/or Their Data:** *(if applicable)* please email this office with copies of written approvals or permissions to access participants from external organisations (this includes hospital REC approval), and be aware that recruitment of participants or data collection should not begin until these permissions are secured. Where potential participants are employees please ensure that you have sought permission to access them from the senior authority in the organisation such as Manager/Director/CEO. Be aware that recruitment of participants or data collection should not begin until these permissions are secured. *[I have received a copy of approval from the University of Sheffield Ethics Board – thank you]*
- **UCD Insurance Requirement:** *please note* that the Office of Research Ethics now processes requests for insurance on behalf of the applicant and that there the new Exemption Form (v.6 July 2014) provides instruction for this. **This applies to all UCD studies that involve human subjects including online surveys** (whether they are anonymous or not). *[I confirm that the public liability insurance cover is already in place for this project – no further action is required].*
- **Researcher Duty of Care to Participants:** please ensure that ethical best practice is considered and applied to your research projects. You should ensure that participants are aware of what is happening to them and to their data whether a study is de-identified or not. All researchers have a duty of care to their participants who have the right to be informed, the right to consent to participate and the right to withdraw from the study.

Any additional documentation should be emailed to exemptions.ethics@ucd.ie quoting your assigned reference number (provided above) in the subject line of your email.

Please note that your research does not require a committee review and also note that this is an acknowledgment of your declared exemption status. All Exemptions from Full Review are subject to Research Ethics Compliance Review.

Confirmation of Extension

Dear Ita

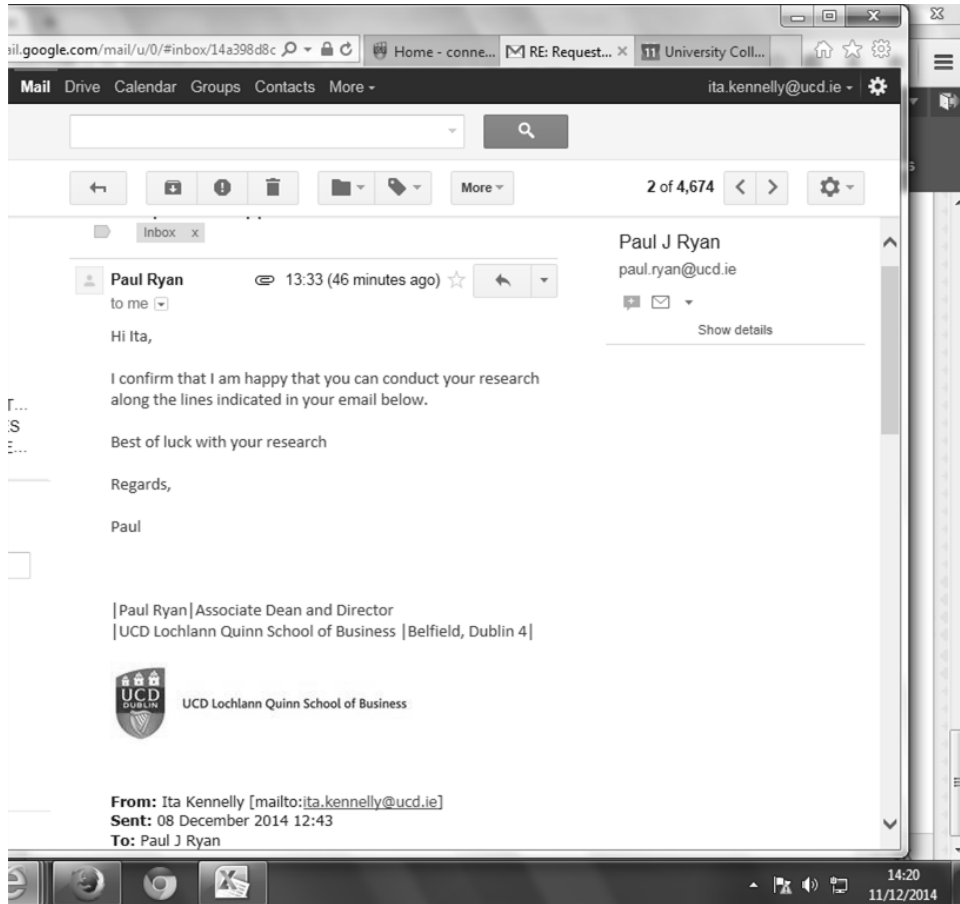
Thank you for submitting the form. The time extension you request has been noted and I confirm that your study remains exempt from full review.

There is no need to submit the sign copy of this form.

Best regards,
Maciek

Appendix 6

Approval (Business) UCD



Appendix 7

Information Sheet for Participants

On Finding Voice: Perspectives on the discovery and development of voice in academic writing.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Project Overview

This project seeks to understand and interpret the experiences and perceptions of a range of students and academic staff relating to their academic writing and the use of their own voice in their writing. Interviews will be conducted with students and staff members from the School of Business. Part of the research will involve a discussion on a sample of your writing. (For students, this may be an essay or assignment you completed. For academic staff this may consist of a journal article or paper).

Interviews will be conducted in the School of Business over the course of Semester 2 and Summer 2015. Approximately 15 people will be interviewed. Participants will all be from the School of Business but will be at different stages in their academic career, for example: Undergraduate, Graduate, Doctoral as well as lecturing staff.

As a (INSERT), you are being asked to take part in this research.

Your Participation

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary at all stages of the process. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If, at any stage of the process you decide to withdraw, you are free to do so. You do not have to give a reason.

Your participation in the research will involve two stages:

(a) You will be asked to email an example of your academic writing and to attach a short paragraph detailing your reason for your choice and your thoughts on the writing.

(b) You will also be invited to participate in an interview. This will last approximately one hour and will be recorded. All interviews will take place in the School of Business at a time that is convenient to you. The interviews will comprise a selection of general and focused questions that will enable you to talk about your

experiences of writing and your perception of voice in writing. Part of the interview will involve a discussion on your sample of writing. This part of this research will adopt a narrative approach. This means that I will be listening to your experiences, your impressions and your thoughts. There are no right and wrong answers. You do not need to prepare for the interview in any way.

I will make every effort to ensure that the research process is a positive experience for you. I commit to ensuring that your well-being is not compromised at any stage of the research. Should you wish to withdraw from the project, you will be free to do so. Likewise, if you feel at any stage of the project that you wish to raise an issue, you may contact my doctoral supervisor (INSERT DETAILS) or (XXXX) in the School of Business.

While there will be no immediate benefits for those participating in the project, it is hoped that this research will make some contribution to our understanding of the needs of students and staff in relation to academic writing.

USE OF DATA AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Data from this research project will be used for the purposes of preparing a doctoral thesis for the University of Sheffield. The findings may also be used in preparation of journal articles or conference papers relating to the doctoral thesis in the future. The proposed date for completion of the doctoral thesis is October 2016.

All information collected over the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your real name will not be used in the thesis or in any subsequent report or publication.

Data will be stored on an external hard drive which will be encrypted for protection.

ETHICS

This research project has been ethically approved via the School of Education's Ethics Review Procedures at the University of Sheffield. It has also been approved by the UCD School of Business Ethics Review Committee.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this research project. If you wish to discuss any aspect of the research in advance of providing consent, please contact me via details provided below:

Ita Kennelly

Appendix 8

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Project: On Finding Voice: Perspectives on the discovery and development of voice in academic writing

Name of Researcher: Ita Kennelly

Participant Identification Number for this project: _____ **Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated *[insert date]* explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for the researcher to create a pseudonym for me so that my real name will not be linked with the research materials and I will not therefore be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research
5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of person taking consent	Date	Signature
Lead Researcher	Date	Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Copies:

Once this has been signed the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and the information sheet. A copy of the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project's main record and kept in a secure location.

Appendix 9

Pen Picture of Participants

The following is a brief overview of the participants in this research project. I present a brief pen picture because of the commitment to maintaining participants' anonymity.

Participant 1 – Adam

Adam is a mid-career lecturer in the Quinn School of Business.

Participant 2 – Sean

Sean is a postgraduate researcher working in the Quinn School of Business.

Participant 3 – Ellen

Ellen is a doctoral student who is working as a Research Assistant in the Quinn School of Business. She is in the final stages of her thesis.

Participant 4 - Anne

Anne is an early career academic working in the Quinn School of Business.

Participant 5 - Nessa

Nessa is a Professor who works in both the Quinn School of Business and the Smurfit Graduate School.

Participant 6 – Molly

Molly is a mid-career academic working in both the Quinn School of Business as well as the Smurfit Graduate School.

Participant 7 - Alex

Alex is a postdoctoral researcher working in the Smurfit Business School.

Participant 8 -Marie

Marie is a Master's student in the Smurfit Graduate School having done her undergraduate degree in the Quinn School of Business. She is a part-time student and works full time.

Participant 9 –Stephen

Stephen is a Master's student in the Smurfit Graduate School having done his undergraduate degree in the Quinn School of Business. He is a part-time student and works full time.

Participant 10 - John

John is a fourth year student in a business degree at the Quinn School of Business and is due to graduate summer 2016.

Participant 11 - Enda

Enda is a second year student in a business and law degree at the Quinn School of Business.

Appendix 10

Transcript of Research Interview

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW 2S
RECORDED ON THURSDAY 23rd JUNE 2015

Opening chat about recording...

I	That looks like it's recording so thanks for coming along
R	Yeah no problem
I	Thanks for the article. It was really interesting.
R	Oh great
I	Is that something that you are preparing for a...
R	So that's a...coincidentally enough was published today
I	Ahh congratulations. Is that your first one to be published?
R	Yeah, yeah it is
I	Good for you, well done
R	It was a long gruelling process...three years
I	Absolutely...I don't know what I had expected but for some reason I had in my head that you were doing an accountancy...kind of
R	Yeah so...it's kind of...I ended up in the accountancy department by a pretty circuitous route like so...
I	Yeah...
R	I did diabetes research for my masters and then the same of my PhD and then S*... you remember... was working with G* on the FD7 Diabetes literacy project and they were looking for a research assistant... saw her...I happened to get ... and I said I would help out and ended up getting involved in the project and then went up to Postdoc position so that's how it all came about
I	Oh... and what's your Undergrad then and your Masters?
R	Both Sociology...Social Science and Sociology
I	Ah that makes more sense then because I felt it was very much because I felt it was very much closer to my kind of... there was a familiarity... This is kind of interesting. Not that I had any preconceptions about what you were going to be sending me but in my head I was thinking more accountancy
R	Yeah...Of course...
I	So it was a pleasant surprise for me that there were no numbers in it.
R	Absolutely...what was your study then?
I	So for me....so mine em I went back studying a few years ago. I mean years ago I did a degree in languages and I went back and did an MA in Higher Education. Mmm I suppose I just wanted to change my career, I was working for years and then...now I am doing the EdD – Doctorate in Education...in the UK with the University of Sheffield
R	Brilliant
I	So my area...which leads us onto it...is...I am interested in looking at Academic Writing and so... did you get a chance to read this? (Info sheet)
R	I didn't
I	Don't worry so I will just talk you through it...just because and I do have a Consent form for you as well...Mmm so really what I am interested in and

	maybe some of this will spark some kind of ...because some of the papers I did actually were critical or touched on critical theory and discourse analysis
R	Oh right that's great
I	Yeah I am interested in critical theory
R	Oh excellent...yeah...yeah
I	This is more an interpretive piece but I...it struck a chord with me some of the stuff you did
R	Am glad to hear that
I	I am interested in writing and academic writing and I suppose I was looking when I started looking at this idea of voice because of that relationship...you know...some of academic writing there is the idea of something very distant but I'm kind of interested in identity and how much of a person is in the writing or not and also so I was looking at this and when I started doing my literature and my research, I just got a lot of different conceptions of voice and a lot of metaphors used for voice so some of what my project is about is kind of exploring all those different meanings...
R	cool
I	And then the research part with people is really looking at peoples' experiences of writing. The narrative approach is what I'm trying to take so really I will be asking questions that try and spark off some recollections about your study about your writing, about the process of writing
R	yeah
I	Then onto to voice and then I am just trying to understand peoples' different perspectives on writing but also on voice in academic writing
R	Aha aha...
I	Really that's kind of it
R	yeah
I	I'll be interviewing...
R	What do you define by voice then?
I	Well that's what I'm exploring...people...there are so many different meanings. There's no right or wrong answer I suppose
R	ok
I	One of the things later on that I will ask you is what it means to you and em literally there is just a whole...
R	So it's interpretation of it
I	Yeah...and the other thing. I am just partly interested in the stories really about writing so it's very much kind of an experiential piece as I say it's narrative so it's all about stories and memories and recollections and within that I'm hoping to I suppose understand a little bit better about peoples' feelings about writing at university so I'm going to be..I think I mentioned to you...I am going to be interviewing a couple of...a few staff members. You are here as Postdoc
R	Yeah
I	Then come September or October whenever I can there will be a number of students. I am trying to understand as well whether perspectives kind of shift at different stages as you...whether and if peoples' relationship to voice or perspective on writing changes...so that's kind of it
R	Sounds great
I	Cool

R	OK
I	OK so if you are happy just take a second there and make sure that you are happy enough that...
R	Ok...23 rd today is it?
I	Yeah...I'm still in my early days so it's not about reading off a list of questions but I have questions as prompts...just as...you know to get into it...
R	ok
I	Brilliant. It looks like we are recording so we'll go for it then. So you just talked me through there and that was really interesting that your background is Sociology and you did your degree and you Masters there and your Masters was around the Diabetes project which led you onto this research role. I suppose just tell me in terms of your current role as research assistant how important
R	I'm Postdoc now yeah
I	Oh sorry as Postdoc. How important writing or academic writing...how much of that role involves it? Give me a sense of it
R	Yeah...I suppose academic writing is my bread and butter so I spend 90% of my time doing that whether it's filling out reports or writing up papers for publication...Emm so yeah it takes a substantial amount of my working day
I	OK and what aspects I suppose could you think- well hopefully you enjoy if it is taking up 90% of your day- but can you think what do you enjoy about it and what do you find challenging about it?
R	So for me...what I enjoy about academic writing and academia in general is the freedom...so it's in many ways it is purely unalienated labour. So you can be...you have a lot of freedom, a lot of creativity on what you write and emm I think for me that's the most enjoyable aspect of it. That's really important for me. Emm in terms of challenges then, emm, so... I guess it's important eh to know that ...eh...I'm pretty dyslexic so emm that kind of colours my experience in writing
I	yeah
R	Quite a bit. Emm and so yeah so it's been a kind of challenge for me like working my way through the undergrad the Masters and eventually into a career in academia. It's been really challenging like. So yeah, that's
I	Well I think your writing is excellent
R	Oh thank you. That was two or three years of crafting, editing, and re-editing. It was a long slog
I	Yeah well it shows...and em. What...how would you describe yourself as a writer? What kind of words would you use to think about your writing and how you approach it?
R	Emm, I would say emm, critical, self-critical
I	OK
R	That the description what comes to mind straight away.
I	OK
R	SO yeah I do spend a lot of time writing and re-writing and perfecting what's in front of me and again I think that comes from having dyslexia and trying to make the writing as clear and as concise and as readable and as accessible as possible. So when it comes out initially it's very garbled...yeah emm it takes a lot of work to make it... intelligible
I	And what kind of work is that? Is that you going back editing? Using

	software?
R	Going back editing, not much software no but it's just constantly going back to the text and saying OK if I was a person coming to this with a completely fresh pair of eyes would I be able to understand what this guy is saying
I	OK.OK
R	So...that's , that's a challenge
I	Can you just think of...is there any story that might indicate this or whatever..? Maybe just thinking about your writing or maybe when you started university or the first papers, given that you had the dyslexia...I mean did you know at school or at university?
R	No. So
I	Can you think about how it came about or how you discovered or maybe even just think back to those early challenges of academic writing at university...if you can think back
R	Yeah so I mean like I was constantly handing in papers late. I had the understanding of the...I had the comprehension of the emm subject matter and but I kept on finding it very difficult to emm get papers in, write them up, to be happy with what it was I was writing, get my kind of...My voice onto the paper essentially, you know? Emm, so yeah as I say I was handing in papers like two weeks late and three weeks late and stuff and then when I eventually got to the Masters that kind of became... It became too much because I was writing maybe four maybe five different essays
I	Chunky.
R	Exactly yes so ...Yeah I realised, at that stage there was probably something wrong because there was such a discrepancy between...on the one hand I could read texts and understand perfectly and then when it comes to write it, or regurgitate it on paper, it would take me forever and I was like there is something wrong here...I'm trying to think how I eventually decided to see an educational psychologist who eventually diagnosed it. I think someone had suggested it emm (pause). Yeah actually in work. What happened was I was working part-time in the meantime between the Undergrad and the Masters and I kept on filing. So I was working in admin and I kept on filing stuff back to front so like I completely messed up the filing system and it was really embarrassing and like this is like menial kind of work...something I should have been able to do in my sleep and I messed up the whole filing system. This is an Opticians and stuff and I was just causing a lot of havoc and stuff. So yeah at that stage I was kind of sussing that there was something up. So emm yeah I went to do the Masters I thought it would be worthwhile to go and see and talk to an educational psychologist about it and that's where I got diagnosed so the official diagnosis is dysgraphia. Yeah it's more on the challenges associated kind of with writing than in like in kind of reading and spelling
I	Yes, OK and did they give you strategies then to address it in terms of your writing? Can you remember how, when you kind of suppose maybe how to manage it, what kind of things happened?
R	Yes just various strategies and different software packages. They suggested that I use what do you call it, voice emm, voice activation software as well that you can speak into speaking into , literally speak into like dragon software, voice to text as well...I didn't find it particularly useful because I talk really fast and it's...

I	It's another job as well
R	Exactly, yeah yeah and the machine found it pretty difficult to understand me I think so I had to kind of abandon that but I think probably the...I developed a lot of coping mechanisms around it, different kind of adaptive coping mechanisms throughout the Undergrad and the Masters as well so...you find ways of compensating for like... Unfortunately a lot of it is just spending extra time on it and that's probably the most frustrating aspect. You are probably spending...you could be spending twice as long as another person in perfecting an important email that needs to be sent or a piece of text that needs to be written ...so that's the biggest challenge with it. The process is enjoyable but just very cumbersome at times
I	Yeah, OK and in terms of- I don't know if you can remember, just talk about how you describe yourself as a writer now- if you look back and kind of think of this idea you know you did an Undergrad, and an MA and the kind of writing you do now, could you kind of maybe see or describe how it's evolved...just generally the writing now not particularly in relation to the dyslexia but just in terms of your writing...maybe the expectations or how you met the expectations along the way
R	Yeah. I suppose like everyone else, I mean, writing, academic writing – there's conventions there to be learned. There's a specific set of... language that you can kind of perfect and master and once you have that then, it becomes a lot, lot easier to kind of become more productive in a lot of areas. So I mean it was a big challenge in terms of...I found a big challenge...I found a massive jump between the Undergrad and the Masters. Yeah so as an Undergrad, I think you're used to writing in a very , kind of, informal, emotive language, also a kind of journalistic kind of language and it takes a long time to make the transition to the more formal academic writing style
I	Yeah. Did you get...? Were there any tutorials or supports for that?
R	No
I	Is it something that's just there...?
R	Not at that stage...that's nearly ten years ago and now there seems to be a lot of structures put in place but certainly there wasn't in my time so emm, you know you might have had opportunities to discuss some of those issues in tutorials and stuff but probably not enough time
I	No...OK and what was it that jump. Emm from Undergrad to MA. Can you think back and say what was the challenge in terms ofwhat were the struggles there or not even struggles but was the challenge?
R	The challenge, I mean, I used to eh...Moving away from opinion-based conjecture towards writing in third person and couching what you are writing in a very objective language, well a seemingly objective language. That's the challenge and to put things a lot more tentatively in the MA. So academics don't like certainty in writing. Everything has to be presented as if it's speculation
I	And when you went on to do the Doctorate?
R	Yeah again, so that was. I suppose at the PhD stage when I had done the MA thesis I learned some of those skills so by the time I made the transition to the PhD then, it was refining them further
I	And in terms of your supervisory relationship...would writing be something that was ever discussed?
R	Yeah yeah well he would have been aware of the challenges associated with

	<p>writing as a dyslexic person. So he gave me kind of plenty of space. He wasn't remotely concerned about grammar issues, he thought that it academics are too pedantic in general about that kind of issue so he was completely willing to forego all that aspect of it and to correct it or to review whatever I was submitting to him – even if there were a lot of grammatical errors – and he was very supportive, he was making suggestions on how to make the language a bit clearer and stuff so that was yeah that was really important and I don't think I would have got the PhD without his support in that area..I probably would have given up a long time ago...</p>
I	<p>Would you say it was a less traditional stance...he was interested in what you had to say?</p>
R	<p>Yeah it was a very very very unorthodox way or style of doing things</p>
I	<p>Interesting...emm can you just think as well - and maybe we have touched it – of maybe a time or a person or experience that might have influenced you in your academic studies or shaped the way you write. I think we touched on them. Is there any kind of Aha moment or maybe around some of the things you touched upon about you know we talked about that differences situations tentatively...can you remember how those different realisations emerged or was there something you read, was there a book or a person that you talked to or how did they just grow organically...I don't know just...</p>
R	<p>Again, I think it would have been my supervisor who would have pushed that and yeah, Ciaran would have pushed me in that direction certainly so you need to...yeah learning to write as an academic was kind of – even though he didn't like the language used. He thought it was far too inaccessible and kind of esoteric – yeah he have probably been the key person I would say that would have pushed me in that direction</p>
I	<p>And how did you find that...It's almost, I don't know. I don't want to be putting words but did you ever have a moment where you felt you had to unlearn things you had learned. You know in terms of the writing at Undergraduate level and possibly the beginning of Masters and then at Doctorate level. Is there a bit of a shift...? I am thinking of my experiences</p>
R	<p>Yeah, I think again it was a jump from the Undergrad to the Masters. I mean the Masters was a bit of shock to the system in that sense and even when I moved to the Masters level, I hadn't even developed an awareness of the difference between descriptive language or analytical language so when I was writing I was fusing the two together. So you have to learn with every piece of academic writing that you present all the facts first and then you give your opinion and let the person make their mind up based on the facts rather than getting it the other way around where you give your opinion first and then you try to back it up with facts. You let the person, you know review the evidence in their own minds first before giving your own opinion and I guess that's a kind of convention that I wasn't aware of. It's not even taught at all in undergraduate level. It's like as if it's meant to kind of...you're meant to know it already or watch it magically kind of materialise through I don't know catharsis or whatever.</p>
I	<p>Yeah, this project is trying to see what awareness people have at different – I mean it's only a small project, it's not going to represent everybody but it's interesting to see the kind of, to see where does that come or does it. Just in terms, about your writing, oh yeah, because you had a background in Sociology and them moved into a more Business sphere, did you perceive any</p>

	differences in terms of writing conventions between the two disciplines?
R	Emm so yeah. I am trying to think of an example of that...I suppose most of the texts that I would be consuming as a Postdoc are pretty similar to ones I was reviewing through my PhD. Still looking at the medical history around Type 2 Diabetes so I haven't a huge experience the more management style
I	Some of the more management style or financial... yeah, OK
R	Yeah but what I did notice and I was quite surprised is that emm is that I can see now that it has a massive emphasis on Sociological, Interpretivist kind of research tradition. I wasn't really expecting that in the slightest. I thought it would be very Empiricist kind of, Positivistic style of kind of research like em basically an emphasis on numbers and nothing else but no there's a lot of emphasis on the subjective, Interpretivist tradition which I was very surprised about.
I	Very interesting. ..Which is where you are coming from. We'll talk a little bit about your article and thank you for letting me have a read of it. So you... So how does it feel to be published today? I am catching you on a good day!
R	Yeah you certainly are. Emm, it's been a long time coming
I	Yeah. Well fair play to you. Honestly heartfelt congratulations to you
R	Thanks very much. Yeah thank you. It's almost three years. So I submitted it in August 2012 and there was a lot of kind of setbacks along the way and stuff so I was expecting it to be published last year so...but it's great. It's great to see it published online and it does feel like emm, because it's published in Sociology of Health and Illness, the journal, it's a good journal and it's one of the first ones I read as a Masters student and I always loved reading it so it just seemed to fit well
I	Good for you
R	Yeah I was really really happy
I	And emm, can you ...we've touched on some of that...how it came about. I'm assuming that a lot of it is based on your PhD research?
R	Yeah. So it's basically a condensed version of two chapters of my PhD
I	Yeah ok and in your own - I don't know how much you've considered your own career and career development but – how do you see writing as something going forward. Are there more articles you would like to publish? Where do you see your ...
R	Yeah. Articles, peer reviewed articles are king in academia so I mean that is something that I have to keep on top of. It's pretty challenging. Emm this was a very very time-consuming piece of work. It took a long long time to get to the final part with it. So...A lot of weekends spent just constantly re-writing, editing and proofreading and yeah it... (Interrupted by me!)
I	It's written very well. It's a really nice piece and very interesting and interesting on a number level. On an academic level but also just picking it up and reading through the... it. There's a lot of interesting things that you don't need to have years in academia or be a seasoned reader of journals to ...I think it's accessible at the same time
R	And that's what I really aim for. That's what I really value in a piece of work is trying to make it as accessible as possible and make it interesting for people outside academia. I think that's
I	I think you've achieved that. Honestly I think it's great. I'm just going to ask you a couple of questions. It's not necessarily anythinghave you ever

	considered your voice in writing this or who or maybe with your supervisor did you have conversations around voice and positionality?
R	I suppose as a Sociologist, you always have to be aware of your own pre-conceived ideas and you have to be as reflexive as possible so...yeah I mean...you're constantly going back and forth and thinking about that as you write. Emm
I	Why Diabetes? What was that related to? Was there a personal reason in there?
R	Emm yes...so I have Type 1 Diabetes yeah
I	Ah OK
R	Emm so (pause)...Yeah it was kind of during the Masters I was trying to figure out something to do. The area of speciality was sociology of health and illness and I was trying to figure out which area can I go into what can I specialise in and...I realised that I have a lot of experiential experience with Diabetes so why not look at that in more detail and as it turned out, I started looking at literature and there wasn't a huge amount of sociological input in that area. There hadn't been many publications at all related to Type 2 Diabetes. Emm so I guess from my point of view the whole idea of Sociology is to challenge taken for granted assumptions and for me there was a lot of taken for granted assumptions around Diabetes. People think people with Diabetes are just lazy or like emm they're won't get up off the couch or all these kind of typical kind of lazy assumptions associated with the condition and what I wanted to do was to look at those taken for granted assumptions and to try to contextualise them and to try to highlight the ideological roots essentially.
I	And when, I noticed that you used the personal pronoun...sometimes we don't see it. You put yourself in there. How would you describe the IHere you said, I sought to problematize....when are you comfortable using the "I" Do you ever have a moment of Can I say it like this or with your Sociology background is it all ok because sometimes I find with Business students that it's almost like it's not allowed nearly. There's a sense of a funny feeling about it and yet you use it very comfortably and appropriately I think
R	Yeah. It takes a while in academia to figure out when it is appropriate to do so and in what in what setting to do so. So here it's... you're describing your experience in going about researching the topic and that's obviously a very very personal experience so in that case I think we had decided that it would be an appropriate time to use that. And... you also have to look at the journal as well and see what they accept or do they see as acceptable so I guess for me that was for me was key. You are describing your personal experience of researching the topic so you can present it in that kind of language whereas emm...
I	You might be interested. One of the ...I have it here. One of the frameworks I use, not that you need to know this but you might find it interesting... when I am looking at voice...this is just one where they have actually looked at the use of the personal pronoun and the different "I"s that you can read. So "I" representing I the architect. Sometimes you see in writing where someone is saying I will show you around my assignment or my paper and I will tell you what I am doing. It's on this kind of continuum and it's related to power. I know you are interested in power and power relations so that kind of level of authorial presence so how much of you is in your text. So when you get down

	here about the opinion holder and “I” the Originator so in your PhD, you were coming up with new evidence, coming up with new hypothesis maybe you are very much in a powerful authorial position. When you are at Undergrad you might tend to use “I” but just to say “I will conclude this paper...” It’s an interesting one isn’t it...?
R	It is yeah it’s fascinating yeah
I	So you know there I would say that where you say “I problematize...” you are recounting the research process there and I am finding that people that are using “I” but that they are comfortable putting themselves as the researcher but then less... or maybe still a bit tentative with “I” “I have come up with this” And it’s just interesting just as you are saying it there I feel that you are very much at that... you know, here I am as the researcher and I am presenting this process. It’s just...
R	Well in a way, for me, it’s come full circle so I would have been starting writing articles in undergrad so I would have started there (pointing at upper end of continuum)
I	Interesting....so you had these ideas and did they get bashed out of you? (laugh)
R	Yeah pretty much (laughing)
I	So you had to go back around and start at the end of the line? (on continuum)
R	Completely. By the Masters you are afraid to use the “I” at all and then by PhD stage you are like OK, I know how to use this and when not to use it
I	It’s a very funny thing. People have ideas about it and then when you try and peel it back, it’s kind of implicit...it’s never necessarily...they don’t often remember why or how but it just seems to be a sense that they have. I just think that one is kind of interesting but anyway...moving onto voice and I will talk about your article again...When I talk about voice what would be your conception of voice or what do you think it means. What’s your understanding of it?
R	In terms of voice then, I would imagine how your own, I guess, personal experience essentially drives the text. You know? I guess that’s for me
I	Yeah and so for example maybe were writing an academic paper and given a title there was a difference then when you chose the topic of Diabetes. It was something that you had something...?
R	Yeah. It was through a mixture of kind of personal experience, experiential experience, experiential knowledge used by me I guess that influenced my decision to research it in the first place so...
I	Have you ever considered voice as something when writing any of your papers? Is it something you have ever even considered?
R	I mean, I guess not formally but as I say the whole idea of reflexivity how your pre-conceived ideas can give rise to certain interpretations of the world, and of the social world and they are something that you are conscious of the whole time as a social scientist. It’s part of your training.
I	And what about in terms of your article. You were doing Discourse analysis in terms with doing discourse analysis and I suppose socially constructed ideas and cultural values and voice. Do you feel any correlation there with voice?
R	Emm yeah I mean because as I say, it’s essential when you are looking at or doing a piece of critical discourse analysis, this is essentially, you are looking at how people’s voice is implicit in what they are writing even if they are not

	necessarily aware of it and also I mean that's kind of reflective of their wider kind of cultural background, their experiences, the institutional environment they are in you know all these kind of aspects..
I	How much could I learn, if you took a step back, knowing that you wrote this, how much could I learn about you (name) by reading an academic paper?
R	(long pause) It's a good question. I mean the area that I am in health and inequalities and health in general, most people become interested in that area because of their personal experience, I think. Everyone has their own personal experiences or stories to tell around a specific life event that is usually health related that makes them interested in this particular area of research. Emm, and I think, yeah, for most people that would be reflected in their writing and their research interest.
I	Anything else?
R	I am trying to think what else. I mean.....
I	This methodology that you use...how would you say that...Is there something in your choice? You could have done this probably a number of ways but you went a critical way...
R	Yeah...
I	I am not saying this is but am just wondering....
R	Yes so I suppose you get a sense of a particular emm ideological and political persuasion as well, yeah and I guess that's slightly unusual I guess in academic writing as well in the sense that... well that's to hope for in critical discourse analysis is to highlight these hidden agendas or ideologies. It's the whole point to look at things that seem like common sense and to highlight the ideological underpinnings of them so yeah you would obviously get that as well from it
I	So I suppose I will talk about the different conceptions of voice and I will take this out (Wordle) and one of them is around Identity and emm I suppose this idea that for years like that traditional academic writing is this idea of objectivity and distance and yet - and this is part my area in research – there is presence in the text and voice is one way to look at it, it's an opportunity to look at it...So I did this Wordle, I have to say I did this and the person I met the other day asked if it (words) were weighted in size and I went No it is just that they were pretty! So there is no weight in size it was just me doing it. Voice is really ambiguous. There are lots of meanings so when I went about doing this study – and maybe you had the same experience when you were ploughing through literature for your PhD- you change your own views and you develop. So what I wanted to do, because this is about voice is just get a sense of anything that jumps out at you. Things you feel right, that fits with your idea about voice at first and then maybe other ones that we can discuss. This is just a way for us to open up the discussion about voice generally so...
R	So what stands out in terms of my own...?
I	Yeah what just jumps out when I say these are all metaphors for voice...some I didn't choose
R	It has to be relevant to this?
I	No... anything that jumps out or might resonate with you that you think sounds about right
R	I guess from my background, I guess, emm, Authority, emm, Power, Historic. Just reflecting on the piece that I have written there, Social, Criticality...

I	Anything jumping out that you go what's this about, or I'm not sure
R	Discourse obviously emm what's Juice?
I	Yeah (laughing) OK anything else, I will come back to them
R	Is that Right to Speak I presume?
I	Yeah, sorry
R	That's it
I	OK I will give you a just give you kind of a brief. I suppose there are a number of different schools of thought around voice and it kind of. One of its modern origins and this idea of voice in writing was to do with this idea of self-expression and school of expressivist in the 60s and 70s Amherst you know and it's kind of free the writer within so a lot of it was a new form of breaking the chains away and freeing that kind of that individualistic, free yourself and emm so that kind of centred around, in America, in that kind of composition studies but then started to move across academia but some of the kind of phraseology from that would have been Juice, that voice is juice. This is flowing out of that it's the creative instinct, the self-knowledge. The idea that it resonates is that it is real and authentic and true to yourself. So very much this self and expressivist. Audible is this idea that you can hear a voice in a text and it is interesting maybe you do that when you are doing you are re-reading and editing that you are listening so you hear it and if it sounds right it reads right. So then you have somewhere around the 80s with the postmodern and post-structuralist thinking that everything is historically and culturally mediated so that voice became this idea that we are socially constructed so we don't have a voice so they were moving away from the individual and going into this we are all just products of our environment and then that evolved again into something more in the Identity area where there was a school of thought saying we are not socially determined, we are socially constructed so that we still have some agency to evolve and that I suppose that sense of temporality around identity and the voice. The voice...some of my questions are past, present and future. You know what you have written or what you believe doesn't necessarily mean it's what you are going to believe in five years' time. And then the Power. Agency is that idea or view of the right to speak but also within the educational context that sometimes the power relations – and maybe you have thought about this. I don't know if you have ever come across Paulo Freire?
R	Yeah
I	So that idea the way, the more traditional kind of ways of writing and teaching in education that the student is empty and has nothing to say, a kind of empty vessel to be filled
R	Sure yeah...
I	So some of those things about being more active, how writing can emm you know finding a voice... You used that very naturally about finding your voice in your writing so that's kind of ...it's a very rich and messy area and also very divisive
R	Of course yeah
I	So why I did this was to see what kind of things struck chords with people...From your writing I kind of got a sense of some of the things you might
R	Yeah sure

I	Anything that jumps out now or anything you feel strongly for or against having done that overview?
R	(very long pause) I have to say not really know. I wouldn't see anything that's particularly jarring there for me anyway
I	What voice or voices would you relate to yourself in the paper that you published today?
R	So I mean...for me, this is a combination of I don't know...maybe... ten more than ten, fifteen years of emm, reflecting critically about how society and how social structures impact on your health. So it's quite personal like emm...I can even remember this specific moment in my life, where I said, actually, even without fully realising it, that I wanted to go into this area so.... My Dad was quite unwell for some time and he was in B*** Hospital and you could see the impact which inequality was having in terms of the lives and the health of people in the hospital. Even though I was only 16 or 17 at the time and I got a very palpable sense of that even at that early stage of my life, emm, and I was reading, I think it was a Fintan O'Toole book at the time. It was called <i>After the Ball</i> , and he had a section on emm the state of health in Ireland and he wrote a lot about inequality and about the disparities in health between rich and poor and that very much resonated with me and then I took that then into Undergraduate level and it pretty much kind of, it shaped my vision, my academic vision right throughout the Undergrad, to the Masters to the PhD. Even though I wasn't a very good writer emm... at all! I would have been, I would say probably the bottom of the scrap heap in terms of that like. It took a long time for me to improve and get better at it but it was something that I was very much passionate about. So I guess when I reached the Masters level then I was very conscious that this was something that I wanted to do and I wanted to make my voice heard in that area I guess. Yeah, absolutely. And then Diabetes as an area where for me there's massive inequality there that there that it's just completely ignored that it is two or three times more prevalent in the lower income groups compared to the higher income groups and it's not spoken about. There is just complete silence around that issue and if it is spoken about it's just presumed because the poor...they're lazy, they lack willpower, they won't get up off their arse and do something about it. It's the same discourses happening again and again and again and it seemed that this was completely unchallenged in the area of Diabetes and obesity in general. So what I really was applying was what CR Mills described as a <i>Sociological Imagination</i> so it's trying to change emm peoples' interpretation of seemingly private issues and reframing them as public or political issues.
I	Yeah. It's very interesting. You know even just there you have captured so many things of I suppose a sense of something to say and that even some of those power things and relations...that there is a huge amount of you on this sheet...
R	Yeah there is yeah
I	I would say on this sheet, which is interesting, in your writing...
R	I would say in the area of Sociology, in any academic writing the person is always there. No matter how much people try to bury it and couch it a language of objectivity and distance and that kind of thing, it's always going to be there. I think your particular background and your class and your gender is always going to colour that.
I	I agree and what's interesting is I have talked to a couple of people about their

	studies and they are very much guided towards this idea of objectivity still at Masters level and so it's an interesting kind of...I don't know is it a paradox or a challenge that we're...you know...
R	It's about authority
I	Is it? Is it the best kept secret that keeps us a bit...What is it? (laughing) What do you mean about authority?
R	Essentially, it's trying to establish yourself as the expert, as having a privileged insight into the world which nobody else has...
I	Why do you think students, say at undergrad or at Masters, are taught a certain way and certain academic conventions like the distancing, don't put "I" in – maybe you didn't have much experience in the Sociology in fairness – Why do you think that they are and do you think it appropriate?
R	It's a distancing from ordinary language, from everyday language and it's part of the process of establishing yourself as the expert in the area
I	So it's about the evidence
R	Moving away from the lay and the everyday opinion on the street. Establishing an authoritative voice.
I	OK, just trying to think...do you think that this idea of voice is something that would be useful for students and maybe think if when it might have been useful to have a conversation touching on some of these ideas at Undergrad, Masters and Doctoral level. Is it something that has a potential value in...?
R	So I mean, I think in most sociology classes now and lectures I think the Interpretivist kind of viewpoint is drilled into people from a fairly early stage where it might be more useful is in the – from my point of view I guess – is in the medical world to make people aware that the particular kind of views or the evidence that they use is you know also influenced by a myriad of different social and cultural and historical factors.
I	And what about here in the School of Business just in your short period of time? Do you feel - I know I asked you earlier - about the differences but have you had any experiences in terms of students or student papers or anything you might have seen? Here.
R	Yeah, I haven't done a huge amount, it's all research that I'm doing so I wouldn't have huge amount of student interaction
I	Just trying to think if there is anything then. I think we are nearly there. You have given me an awful lot of food for thought
R	Good
I	Thank you for your voice. Are there any questions that you have for me?
R	No I don't think so. It's fascinating though
I	Yeah there's a lot in it but it's tricky though to try and
R	Yeah I get it because I have a background in Sociology so it very much speaks to me in that sense
I	Yeah when I read your paper, I thought this is familiar territory to me so... Do you think that helps (the wordle)
R	Yeah for me yeah
I	OK as I have been trying it out. It's a tricky to talk about all these...it's just so abstract
R	No it is if you haven't thought about it
I	It's a way to discuss different and what I am finding is that people are drawn to different things. I mean I am very early days I have just piloted a couple

	and you are my second actual interview but it's different every time.
R	That's great
I	I really appreciate the time and sharing that was brilliant and you know I have to say I really enjoyed reading that so fair play. It's a great achievement.
R	Thanks very much
I	And will you write more now? Something else or do you think you will get another article out of your thesis?
R	The plan is to get two done but I don't know. We'll see. It's a lot of work and I spent a lot of time in my PhD locked up at weekends and I am kind of, I find it difficult to write at the weekends now
I	Do you ever - It's off point thing but... From some of my stuff and the free writing. Do you just write and write and then let it out first and then go back and turn on the editor or do you stop and
R	No if I stopped to edit while I was writing straight away I wouldn't get anything written so I just try to let it as much as I can even if it's just absolute garbled nonsense
I	That's the way. Dyslexia or no dyslexia, I have been written different things – and this is my personal interest you know – I like the idea of writing a lot and part of this is me finding my voice. I never thought I would do something. There is obviously a personal interest in this. Years ago I would have read, it's an interesting book, you might like it, it's <i>On Writing</i> . It's Stephen King, his memoir. It's quite an interesting book you know. He talks about writing and I've read other things and creative texts and this idea that you just write. So what you are doing is absolutely the right thing to do. You let it out. It doesn't matter if it's garbage or you know you have this idea of formulating as you go and then you kind of come back and have a different editor and revising hat. He would, a lot creative writers would have this idea of just write, write write and keeping going and not stop and labour over. So I think what you have actually found as your strategy is actually for a lot of creative writers and people more and more even in academic writing is let it flow, let it out. So just as an aside
R	Yeah that's fascinating
I	You are hitting the right...if you ever want to read, it's <i>On Writing</i> . It's an easy read. Part memoir and part talking about writing and he's very prolific. I don't know it just struck me that it would be an interesting read for you. I have it at home and I will bring it in for you.
R	Yeah that would be great. For me that's really interesting because I had such little confidence with my writing which stemmed from school. I had to learn in my own head how to disassociate the things that they were asking me to write in school from what they were asking in academia. For example, creative writing there is nothing there for me. If someone asked me and gave me a scenario and asked me to write a narrative around that, I'd be staring at the page for three days and I'd just write the most God awful like turgid piece of writing so it took me a long time to realise that just because I am very bad at that doesn't necessarily mean that I am bad at in a more persuasive style of writing or factual piece of writing so there are different forms of skills that can be picked up
I	Listen there's a paper in you on some of your writing
R	Yeah maybe

I	..maybe there is you know in terms of what you are doing is a very helpful way, the other people and possibly there's something there that's never been written yet
R	Yeah maybe yeah. Definitely. I think, to be honest with the level of difficulty I have with the writing, I doubt there have been too many people who have kind of
I	And I suppose it comes back to that idea of voice, having something to say and other things that you, I suppose moved you to continue and carry this interest
R	Yeah. I guess voice would have been absolutely key. It was really just that's what kept me going.
I	Interesting and it's kind of weird that here we are having this conversation on the day
R	Throughout everything it absolutely kept me going because it was so important to me. There was no other way like I wasn't doing it. I wasn't doing it for a career. I was doing it because I was passionate about it and that was it.
I	You know one of the things that students can struggle with is this idea of voice. That's why I think voice is useful and sometimes it comes across when student don't know how to reference or plagiarise and they really struggle with that. You might get things and it's just chunks and it's as if they think why do I have to write it, it's already been said and it's this idea that you know of situating your voice among other voices and I think it's a really useful way of saying it. You have something to say. You know other people have said and you're going to... but there is something in you that ownership and authority (the word you used) that you that you feel ready to situate yourself with other voices and people to produce a paper. I think it's a really nice way of looking at it and putting it and there is opportunity to I don't know talk to students about developing that voice
R	I really like, I really really like what you're doing yeah
I	Well, look I will give you On Writing because I have a feeling that you just might like it and you know what, there could be a paper there about your writing
R	I hadn't given it much consideration but certainly...
I	Something that possibly isn't out there. I don't know but it's a good tale to tell
R	Yeah as I say, I can definitely identify with this as well. I guess voice kind of, my thinking of it was imagination, the sociological imagination. When I read that CR Mills text, I realised that that kind of sociological imagination had been there in me in my school days. You can see that some students get it, it's there already it's completely fertile ground other students don't have it at all they just don't get it the slightest
I	I would say for me. I don't know. I didn't have a fantastic experience at university and I actually spent a lot of my life thinking that this kind of academic stuff wasn't for me and when I did my Master's I worried that I wouldn't be able for it and then after it I realised I had so much more. I have this huge, big, capacity to take on more. That was my kind of interesting thing, finding voice. I had things to say and I could write. There's lot of personal obviously. I am quite open about it and that's why I am interested and it's never discussed really.
R	No it's not at all. I think it's brilliant and great

I	It kind of brings things out
R	It does yeah, really enjoyed it. Thanks