

Academic and Workplace Disintegration in the MTech Policing: Interdisciplinary Research-Based Collaborative Writing Workshops

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Abstract

In most cases academic literacy practitioners are invited by academic departments to administer writing workshops to postgraduate students who experience challenges with writing research proposals and dissertations. As an academic literacy practitioner, I design and implement academic writing workshops to students from the Policing discipline. Moving from an Applied linguistic discipline to a transdisciplinary context under the Department of Police Practice requires one to understand the disciplinary discourses. Each discipline has its own discourses, and literacy practices which are not universal. In this paper, I explore how academic literacy practitioners can use collaborative ethnographic research methods to describe the discipline and knowledge types when designing appropriate interventions to address academic literacy needs. Findings suggest that the police professional subculture clashes with academic discourse, and that the workplace is anti-intellectual, yet both workplace and academic knowledge is important in academic literacies. They also point to the mismatches between students' expectations and the supervisors' expectations. The culture clashes suggest that the power relations between the university and the workplace are contested, and the intersection between the workplace and academic contexts that is envisaged in students' texts results in a tenuous relationship, yet it is part of the discipline. Some workplace values and practices appear to be in conflict with academic discourse practices that are espoused by literacy practitioners.

Introduction

As more postgraduate students gain entry into Masters and Doctoral studies, there has been increasing attention on postgraduate academic literacy as an area of research and teaching in South African Higher Education (Ndlangamandla, 2012, 2015 & Paxton, 2013). Some studies focus on the relationship between language difficulties, academic literacy and completion rates (Holtzhausen, 2005, Van Aswegen, 2007). A comparative study of the top 10 institutions in South Africa revealed that Unisa was the least performing institution, and went on to place the Masters graduate output at the 11th place in 2011, (Mouton, 2013) . There is a general observation that ODL students seem to take longer than the minimum required time to complete. A common response to the low completion rates of postgraduate suggests is setting up interventions in the form of research writing workshops, writing centres, proof-readers, and language editors.

As a result, there has been a proliferation of postgraduate research writing workshops at the University of South Africa (Unisa). Electronic notices are sent regularly inviting students to attend these workshops. The workshops usually last between two to three hours and can run up to a number of days, at times. Heeralal (2015) writing about the Unisa context, observes that supervisors need to focus on proposal writing, research methodology and data analysis. The proposal is a contested genre that can also be used as a gate keeping mechanism, (Cadman, 2002). There is very little research and teaching that uses an academic literacies approach on postgraduate academic writing.

I have been contributing to the growing field of academic literacies research and teaching by focussing on the Magister Technologiae (MTech) students at this Open Distance Learning (ODL). I conduct postgraduate academic writing workshops twice a year to Policing students who are mainly in their first year of registration and have to first write a research proposal. These workshops are organized by the Department of Police Practice. They last for a week and cover a wide range of topics, such as, research paradigms, literature review, research methods, library skills, and data analysis.

Problem and purpose of the paper

The disciplinary practices and discourses can be a mystery for outsiders, as I learnt through the evidence from conducting participant observation of a research proposal writing workshop targeted at the MTech policing students. There is a mismatch between the students' expectations and the supervisors' expectations. In this essay, I seek to answer the questions: What are the discourse practices in the police professional context? What are the writing –

based practices and values in the MTech degree? Firstly, I discuss findings from semi-structured interviews with the supervisors to reveal some of the sociocultural values held by the workplace and the academic context and how these result in discourse and knowledge clashes. In these interviews, I sought to uncover the values and practices of the supervisors in the MTech degree. Secondly, there is a description of a research proposal writing workshop for the MTech students. In the final discussion, I suggest how ethnographic lenses contribute to the academic literacies approach by highlighting some of the sociocultural practices impacting on academic writing.

The Academic literacies theory and method

Lillis et. al (2015: 4) defines academic literacies 'as a critical approach to researching and teaching of writing and literacy and to the role and potential of these activities for individual meaning making and academic knowledge construction in higher education.' I use the academic literacies approach to describe the challenges of students' writing and to design ways of supporting students with academic reading and writing. Lea and Street (1998) explain that academic literacies developed from New Literacy Studies (NLS). This approach views literacies as social practices involving epistemology, ideology and identities. Institutions are sites of power and discourse; where there are plenty communicative repertoires; for example, genres, fields, and disciplines. Lillis (2001) describes academic writing, 'essayist literacy', as an institutional practice of mystery which excludes students from participating in higher education. An academic literacies approach foregrounds practices, discipline and knowledge types (Scott and Lillis, 2007). What is also central in academic literacies research is the epistemological-ideological approach (Lillis and Rai, 2011, across the disciplines). A focus on the disciplinary discourses is preferred in the academic literacies approach. Within the NLS, writing and reading are understood as 'social and context-dependent practices that are influenced by factors such as power relations, the epistemologies of specific disciplines and students' identities' (Wingate & Tribble, 2012:482). The academic literacies approach uses ethnographic methods to investigate literacy as a social practice. As mentioned by Scott and Lillis (2007:11), 'the principal methodology inherent in an ideological model of literacy is that of ethnography, involving both observation of the practices surrounding the production of texts – rather than focusing solely on written texts – as well as participants' perspectives on the texts and practices'. The ethnographic perspective is what forms the bases of this paper.

Previous research emphasizes a collaborative approach to working with the disciplines between academic literacies practitioners and disciplinary experts (for example, Jacobs 2013; Lillis and Rai, 2011). Lillis and Rai (2011) describe a collaborative research process between

an academic literacy researcher (Lillis) and a social work academic (Rai). Similarly, Jacobs (2013) describes a model of collaborating with insiders in the disciplines in order to unpack disciplinary discourses. Although collaboration has been touted as a good practice involving discipline specialists with academic literacies practitioners, there has been less emphasis on the ethnographic methodology, in other words, how to do it (c.f. Winberg et. al 2013). The question of knowledge and academic literacy has been foregrounded in academic literacies research, (Jacobs, 2013). Jacobs (2013, 132) argues that discipline-specific approaches 'should be focussing on what counts as knowledge in the disciplines, and then making explicit for students the principles through which new knowledge is created.' Paxton and Frith (2013) argue for the importance of embedding academic literacies into disciplinary curricula. They draw on evidence from students' scientific reports in biological, earth and environmental sciences. In their findings, the ways of knowing of the discipline appears to contradict students' prior discourses.

Writing in the disciplines: Blending professional and academic writing

Unisa merged with Technikon South Africa in 2004 in order to become an Open Distance Learning Comprehensive university. Unisa is therefore in a position to offer and accept both the technological, vocational, and professionally based qualifications and those that are academic in nature. However, there are no explicit strategies of integrating the workplace and academic knowledges in some of the departments, (see, Ndlangamandla, forthcoming). The department of police practice continues to award both the BTech and MTech. At postgraduate level, students are required to write research proposals and dissertations. This is where academic literacy practitioners are invited to assist. Elsewhere, I have observed the paucity of literature in connection with academic literacy for the MTech policing students (Ndlangamandla, 2013). The MTech policing is a master's by dissertation offered by the department of police practice at Unisa. It enrolls students who are either working for the South African Police Service (SAPS) or other security related fields. The requirement for admission is that the students should have a BTech in a security related field. The department of police practice is part of the school of criminal justice, and belongs to the college of law. The research that students conduct is based on the workplace. Although students rely on social science research methods book, it is not clear whether these are relevant for criminal justice. In addition, research writing includes both knowledge production and academic literacy.

Graduate writing workshops are common interventions for supporting postgraduate academic reading and writing, although not much research has been done on the impact of these workshops. There has been little or no introduction of other interventions, such as writing groups, writing centres, and writing circles at Unisa. For example, Chihota and Thesen (2014) describe some of the postgraduate pedagogies that are utilized at the University of Cape Town, particularly, writers' circles. In addition, Aitchison (2006) describes the advantages of research writing groups. On impact assessment, Fredericksen and Mangelsdorf (2014) followed a multilingual and a multidisciplinary approach of teaching dissertation writing to postgraduate students in a US university. They observed that 'a generalist writing workshop cannot accomplish what writing instruction within a student's discipline can accomplish even when the course instructor seeks assistance from students' faculty advisors.' In my approach, the academic literacies and the writing in the disciplines (e.g. Wingate, 2015), I seek to avoid a generalist writing workshop.

Conceptualizing the discipline

Christie and Maton (2011: 4) state that disciplinarity can be broadly defined 'as referring to the organization of knowledge and of intellectual and educational practices for its creation, teaching and learning.' Mapping the disciplines and knowledge domains onto academic literacies (discourses and genres) in order to design interventions is one of the challenges of academic literacy practitioners.

Studies on the sociology of education have described disciplines. In describing knowledge and discipline variation, Becher and Trowler (2001, 36) use the following four classifications: 'hard-pure', 'soft-pure', 'hard-applied', and 'soft-applied'. This classification is useful in the sense that it describes the forms of knowledge under the four broad categories of Pure Sciences 'hard-pure', Humanities 'soft-applied', Technologies 'hard-applied', and Applied Social Sciences 'soft-applied'. The nature of knowledge that corresponds with disciplinary groupings is also described by Becher and Trowler (2001). For example, they explain that in the pure sciences knowledge is cumulative and atomistic or treelike, in the humanities knowledge is reiterative and holistic or river like, in the technologies knowledge is purposive and pragmatic and lastly in the applied social sciences it is functional and utilitarian. Becher and Trowler's (2001) work uses these four clusters to describe what they refer to as academic tribes. Following these disciplinary groupings, Muller (2009) describes knowledge fields using categories like the hard, versus soft disciplines and also the pure versus the applied disciplines. Muller (2009) then shows the complex relationship between professions like teaching, clinical psychology, tourism and social work. He argues that some professions are

fluid, diffuse and less organized and have less foundational disciplines in their curricula, he also makes a distinction between disciplinary knowledge and curricular knowledge.

As mentioned above, recent works in academic literacies foreground knowledge. Freebody, Maton and Martin (2008) emphasize a refocus on knowledge and disciplinarity to address the challenges faced by literacy educators with students for whom the language of instruction is not the first language as a 'specially visible display of a much broader set of problems arising from a lack of a common vocabulary for theorising knowledge and disciplinarity (190).' Freebody et al. (2008, 191) asserts that, 'disciplines can be understood as social fields of practice comprising both relatively formal structures of knowledge and practices, and actors who share interests and norms (whether explicit or tacit) of knowledge production and communication.' In short, what I build on from them is the fact that a disciplinary composition has implications for the way reading and writing occurs in any discipline (Freebody, et al., 2008).

My research has been based on analysing students' texts in order to uncover the discourse clashes between academic discourse and workplace based discourses. How the features of texts are shaped by the discipline's position remains central to language and literacy educators. Likewise, Freebody et al. (2008, 192) asserts that:

This is the strong form of this argument: that each discipline has its own distinctive set of preferred genres, ways of inter-relating and co-interpreting language and other modalities (Lemke, 1998), register combinations, ways of coordinating knowledge in language and image, ways of using abstraction and technicality, and so on – to summarise: its own take on the uses of literacy.

In this paper, I therefore use a sociocultural approach in order to explore the research writing within policing as a discipline. Flowerdew and Costley (2017: 4) express the fact that the way one writes in Mathematics varies greatly from the way one writes in History.

Methodology

Research was conducted through ethnographic framing. This method consists of limited ethnography or an ethnographic perspective (Street, 2010), as opposed to classical ethnography (Hammersley, 2006).

Hammersley (2006:4) notes that classical ethnography originated from anthropology in the early twentieth century. In the anthropological sense:

Ethnography involved actually living in the communities of the people being studied, more or less round the clock, participating in their activities to one degree or another as well as interviewing them, collecting genealogies, drawing maps of the locale, collecting artefacts, and so on. Moreover, this fieldwork took place over a long period of time, at least a year and often several years.

'Limited' ethnography relies on methods like participant observations, self-reflections, and unstructured interviews combined with linguistic or discourse analysis. This encompassed participant observation of a one-week workshop and conducting unstructured interviews with two supervisors. I used non-directive, and reflexive interviews with the supervisors, (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 152).

Participant observation occurred through my facilitation of a research writing workshop. I was invited to participate in the workshop to facilitate a four-hour session on academic writing, as part of the ongoing collaboration that I have been conducting with the department of police practice over the last decade. Three supervisors were interviewed for this paper. Two of them were ex-police officials and the other, a white female professor had never been a police officer. This made the connection between the workplace culture and the discipline possible for my research. I interviewed two male supervisors, one a full professor and the other one a senior lecturer in the department of police practice, and both black. Data analysis was conducted through an interpretative ethnographic analysis. I use the pseudonyms Villa, Menzi and Kgomotso to refer to the supervisors, and I also disguise the identities of the students by using other pseudonyms. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the institution and from the specific individuals involved in the research. The following were the findings.

Supervisor's perspective; Police workplace subculture

Villa's perspective

As a sub-question, I asked one supervisor to comment on the influences of workplace and professional writing on proposal writing, paraphrased as 'How do supervisors teach students the differences between workplace and research writing?', Villa observed that it is a good thing if the students relate their research to their duties. She said she likes it when the students 'mix research with work' because the students know that area very well. Villa said she teaches her students 'bracketing', a technique for the separation of work and research defined above, and makes them write a 'long full paragraph' on bracketing. She stated that studies based on the workplace 'go quick', and are completed in good time. Villa's response was not what I was

looking for in relation to my research question, however, she gave an answer which may relate to 'research literacies'.

Villa noted that she discouraged students from researching something outside their current workplace. She gave an example of a student, whose studies concerned sector policing in Tembisa, although he was currently working in the Head Division Training in Pretoria and not in sector policing in Tembisa. She gave the following statement below:

I have got at the moment a student who is working in head division training and he is doing his research on sector policing in Tembisa. Now he knows nothing about sector policing. So it's a big learning curve for him, but if he was working in sector policing, he would have known the act, the regulations and all of those, so I actually think I would recommend that the student is doing it in the line of work, (Interview with Villa).

Villa said that this particular student was struggling in his studies. Sector policing is a policing operational strategy, and may not be understood by a student who is working in training. There are acts and regulations that govern sector policing. Some of these acts end up being part of the research objectives. According to Villa, the workplace is key for the students. When the supervisor questioned the student to find out what was behind his interest in Tembisa, an area about 50 km from 'the head division training' in Pretoria, she found out that the student had a friend who was doing a similar topic. She used this example to emphasise the need for students to choose a topic based on their workplace practices.

Villa draws strong distinctions between the work-based research and theory. In the interview, she argued that the focus of the MTech degree is more practical than theoretical. Alluding to the divide between theory and practice, or real-world research and 'gap-in-knowledge' research, Villa articulated that:

One aspect that worries me very much is that I think many people think research is esoteric. It should be this highfaluting fancy world. A theoretical argument that sits there. I think there is a place for it but I think there is a very small place for it. I think too little of our research is practical, is hands on, especially in a country like South Africa with enormous policing crime problems. For interest sake, in our department we have got too many M students. We cannot handle all of them. Whereas in the department of criminology I believe, who is more theoretical, and so forth. They have got so few students, because there is not a demand for it. I am actually at the moment for my own research, doing theory testing, but on a very practical level. I think we should bring research down to practical everyday solutions. Obviously most of the

research in our department is qualitative, so it cannot be generalised but it can be transferred. So it's not that we are providing definite answers to all the problems. That's not what we are trying to do - but to specific situations. An example - one of my M students did his research on firearm licenses and at-risk persons. That was about 4/5 years ago, and his recommendations were not implemented by the police. And you know the crisis at the moment at the police sits in with fire arms, and identifying at-risk people. So if they only would have taken his recommendation and implemented it. I am not saying all the problems but many of the problems that they are experiencing at the moment, would not have happened, (Interview with Villa).

Villa expresses a discourse of pragmatism in her attitude to research. For example, she distances herself from research that is 'highfaluting fancy world'. She observes that others view research as 'theoretical' and 'esoteric'. Here the binary is between theory and practice in the policing discipline. Villa compared her department with the department of criminology. Her department has a larger number of students, because of the demand for practical, rather than a theoretical discipline. When mapping the two departments into the knowledge and disciplinary groupings of Becher and Trowler (2001:36), I observe that the Department of Police Practice would fit into the 'soft-applied', while the Department of Criminology would resemble the 'soft-pure'. Both departments are within the social science field. However, one is shown to be pure social science; the other an applied social science. Perhaps it is the 'applied' orientation that makes the MTech degree more popular.

'Practical' research is seen as having the potential to contribute to solutions and improve the work of SAPS. However, sometimes the recommendations made by the MTech Policing students are ignored. This suggests a devaluing of the academic research by the workplace. An example is given by Villa of how a student's research could have solved problems of firearm licenses. Firearms control is one of the priorities for the police. For instance, Vetten (2012:23) argues that 'limiting and controlling the availability of firearms—both legal and illegal—is a police priority and their success can be judged against targets they have set themselves'. According to Villa, therefore, applied and practical research in the context of students' work, can enhance the work of the police, as illustrated by the research on firearms. However, in this case, the workplace ignored the research once it was completed. A point I return to below.

This emphasis on finding solutions to the problems identified in their workplace is the preferred mode of knowledge in the policing discipline and is reflected at times in police students' proposal writing. San Miguel and Nelson (2007:73) underscore the difference between practice-driven research problems as opposed to 'gap in the knowledge' type of research:

In the literature on professional doctorate programmes it is often claimed that what distinguishes these from PhD programmes is the high value placed on generating practice-based knowledge to address 'real-world' problems.

The MTech degree can be described as a degree that is based on 'real-world' policing problems, and the research is based on practice. To illustrate the strained partnership between the university and the workplace, Villa observes that the workplace police 'commissioner' is responsible for the approval of the research topic in the proposal:

No.1 to get permission to do the research, the student compiles a research proposal, and you know that takes 3 months, 6 months. Sometimes even longer, then you submit it to the police. They say no. We don't like this and we don't like that, or we completely don't want the study to happen, because it's too sensitive. Even though it's not sensitive information, you know like security stuff. So that's the one challenge, (Interview with Villa).

The police organisation can make changes to the research or even prevent the research from taking place. In principle, SAPS can insist on the removal of content that may be deemed to be 'sensitive information'.

Supervisors' views on policing as an academic discipline

In one of my research questions, I wanted to describe the writing – based practices and values in the MTech degree in order to explore the disciplinary discourses. This is important in the approach that views writing as a social practice.

According to Menzi, the research carried out by the police is different from Social Science research. Therefore, the books that the students use during their BTech research methods course are not ideal for their studies. Similarly, Kgomotso complained about students' 'underpreparedness' and blamed this on the lack of relevant textbooks during the undergraduate stage. Menzi says there is a need for a book containing information on the criminal justice system, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and the courts.

We are saying let's make it to be on the Criminal Justice System so that when we talk about Criminal Justice System, those officials should be able to understand what you are talking about. In his or her life he can be able to relate to that, we can give examples about the NPA or the courts, correctional services, but if we talk about Social Science, then this guy is getting lost (Interview with Menzi).

Menzi advocates a research module and a book to be introduced at the third-year level, in order to build on the academic discipline. This is the last year in the National Diploma in Policing and is prior to the BTech. This module should be aimed at teaching the police specific methods that are applicable in the policing context. He observes that students get confused if they encounter examples from Social Science research methods. The new textbook that he proposed in the interview (and was currently writing), would be based on examples from the Criminal Justice System, such as the SAPS, the Courts, and the NPA. Menzi suggests that the students are not able to apply Social Science methods to their criminal justice role as 'law enforcement'. This may be in line with Becher and Trowler's (2001, 35-39) classification of the social sciences as both 'soft-pure' and 'soft-applied' in terms of disciplinary groupings or knowledge domains. In this case, policing belongs to 'soft-applied'. This means that the MTech students are struggling to make sense of the knowledge domains, suggesting the need to change their reading material, as proposed by Menzi. Menzi's book was to use Social Science concepts and methods in the context of policing.

In the following discussion, I uncover a number of academic disciplinary practices by narrating the experience of being a participant observer of one week-long workshop at a Unisa venue in Pretoria, where students were invited to come for a 'proposal-writing week'.

Observation of the MTech research workshop

As mentioned above, I was interested in exploring the writing-based practices and values in the MTech degree, and what the writing-based practices in the police professional context were. I was asked to participate in a workshop from the 6th to the 10th of June 2011. The workshop was organised by the supervisors for the new in-take of students registered for the MTech Policing degree (I continue participating in these annual one-week workshops to this date). The attendance ranged between 15 and 21 students for the five days. At Unisa, face-to-face workshops cannot be made compulsory for students to attend because of the ODL mode of teaching and learning. The workshop's focus was on 'Research proposal writing'. The rest of the facilitators for the workshop came from the Department of Police Practice. The topics covered included: research paradigms, academic writing, ethics in research, research question, problem statement, aims and goals, literature review, sampling frameworks, and data collection. The workshop focused on research issues that are typically dealt with in the humanities and social sciences fields. In my view as an academic literacies teacher, this suggests that some research concepts are common to the social sciences, humanities and education disciplines. Ironically, there was less focus on academic writing except for my own session.

At the beginning of the week, on Monday morning, students were invited to express their expectations of the five-day workshop. The expectations were expressed verbally, while one of the facilitators captured them in point-form on a flip chart. The discussion around the expectations lasted for over an hour. The following are some of the expectations that were mentioned, some of them are written in the direct words of the students:

Expectations from the workshop

- a) I would like to know how to write academically.
- b) I would like to know how to quote and how to reference.
- c) I would like to know how to start to write my research. (The student also gave an analogy of how hard it is to learn to drive a car in order to illustrate the challenge of learning to write as an adult student).
- d) One student wanted to know the time-frame which it would take between the lecturer and the student after the student had submitted a draft, that is, the turn-around time of receiving feedback from a lecturer.
- e) The students expressed that they would like to be able to write a good research proposal and to conduct research.
- f) Some of the challenges that they mentioned were referencing, methodology, and how to conduct a literature review.
- g) One student wanted to know how to identify important facts for a problem statement.
- h) One student asked a question about the duration of the MTech degree because some of the students had dropped out.

In relation to (d) above, there were concerns about communication and response time from supervisors. Students wanted to know how to deal with delayed feedback from the supervisors. Some supervisors were blamed for poor communication with the students and not responding punctually to the students. In defence of the supervisors, one of the workshop facilitators mentioned that they would like to get students 'out of the system quickly because they get money from the government,' meaning that the department would like to see the students getting their degrees quickly, so that they can get funding subsidy from the Department of Higher Education and Training. This is one of the benefits to the institution if a student completes successfully. The supervisor who responded to this concern mentioned that she was not capable of speaking on behalf of all supervisors when it came to their punctuality in giving feedback to students.

One of the supervisors responded to (h) above by saying that this workshop had been organised to assist them in getting through. She also mentioned that if they spend more than four years on the degree, the university does not get a subsidy. The duration could be two years for a Masters or Doctorate degree, but it was up to the students to pace themselves by using the networks and the information that would be disseminated during the workshop. The supervisor gave an example of a student who took six years to complete the Masters and two years for the PhD.

These expectations reveal some of the literacy needs and challenges faced by students in ODL institutions. The supervisors responded to those which appear to deal with administrative issues, and roles and responsibility, but not to those which related to research writing. It is worth mentioning that the students' expectations were strongly related to academic writing and yet the workshop focused on research paradigms and methods. Some of the issues raised resonate with generic undergraduate academic discourse and others concerned postgraduate funding, supervision and academic literacies. In the following section, I describe some of the discourse clashes that I observed from the workshop – and the implications for academic literacies.

Power dynamics when receiving feedback

My own presentation usually covers the writing process, writing paragraphs and sections of the proposal, academic reading, reading strategies, note taking, reading comprehension and summarising. There were two female supervisors at the workshop. One of the PowerPoint slides in my presentation showed the writing process (from drafting to publishing). I emphasised that feedback from supervisors was received between the various stages of the writing process. Postgraduate students send their drafts (usually through emails) to the supervisor and then get feedback to be used in redrafting; this process usually takes the form of multiple drafts. One student reacted to this point by saying that if he receives feedback it is negative and he gets disappointed and feels rejected. He retorted, 'I am some police person, you are a supervisor, you have never been some police, how can you tell me what to do?' This was said by one of the most senior police officials in rank who was attending the workshop - a Lieutenant General. This student expressed some doubt at having to be supervised by academics who have never themselves been police. This was one of the strongest indications from the students that there is a divide between the workplace and the academic values.

A supervisor responded and told the students that they should write their own books if they did not want negative criticism, and that this was not possible in academia. Another student

said that, 'practically I know the work'. This student was referring to his professional experience. This exchange corroborates a previous study on feedback that I conducted with MTech students (Ndlangamandla, 2010), where students expressed their frustrations at being asked to do multiple drafts. Studies of research writing at the interface between the professional, workplace, and university context, for example San Miguel and Nelson (2007) highlight such contradictions and complexities. These studies show that students may be unable to understand the relationship/intersection between the three different knowledge domains. This has an impact on academic literacies when they are supposed to write the research proposals.

Criticising the police organisation

While I was facilitating the workshop, I mentioned some of the discourse practices around academic discourse, such as reflection and criticism. I explained the need to adopt a critical stance towards the research topic in the research writing (for example, Bizzel, Wallace and Wray, 2011). One of the students told of an incident of a student who apparently wrote a project that exposed the fact that 'service delivery' was not working. This person received a stern warning from the police commissioner and almost lost his/her job.

In addition, one of the supervisors mentioned that there are policies on conducting research and that the Access to Information Act must be obeyed by students who undertake research within the police force. The research report is also read and approved by the police research management before it is published or submitted for assessment to the university.

There was an intense discussion on the dangers to one's career of criticising the police organisation. Apparently, no criticism is allowed from people inside the police organisation. The students gave an example of a popular crime expert from the Institute of Security Studies and said that because he took early retirement from SAPS, he can say anything, but before that he could not criticise. One student, General Mandla (not his real name), who was senior amongst the group, said that in the issue of criticism, the main thing that the police are looking for is 'discipline' 'protocol' or 'touchline'. I realised that this was police jargon for somebody who was being dismissed, by using a sporting metaphor, in this case, dismissal from the organisation. In other words, failure to obey the rules, follow the commands, adhere to protocol, is likely to render the offender an outsider from the organisation. Critical reflection on one's practice appears to be at odds with the 'rank-and-file' nature of police officers (Adlam, 1999). Academic institutions are founded on values of academic freedom, but a police institution is not.

Criticism can be found in professions as one of the means for 'improvement'. In this case, the workplace contradicts the professional and university values of criticism. Therefore, both feedback and criticism are practices and values that clash with the academic culture and discourses.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore how the workplace sociocultural factors intersect with the academic sociocultural factors, and to explore the nature of the police discipline in order to ultimately describe how the discipline shapes academic writing within the field of Policing. The study also explored the contribution of ethnographic methods to me as an outsider from the policing discipline.

When I probed the supervisors about the challenges with academic writing, they mentioned the absence of relevant textbooks for the students to use. One supervisor mentioned the need for textbooks on the criminal justice system, the NPA, SAPS and the courts; this would be better suited to provide relevant examples of 'knowledge domains', rather than the current social science books which are available for students to use. This suggests that the discipline is associated with these legal institutions but at the moment it was still unclear. Both the underpreparedness and the lack of textbooks suggests that the discipline is still in a flux and can best be understood through interaction with the supervisors, in other words, through collaborative means and ethnographic research.

The participant observation of a workshop further revealed some of the culture clashes between the workplace and university. What struck me during the workshop was that it was largely meant to address research paradigms, but the students expected more help on academic writing. Suggesting a mismatch between students' expectations and supervisors interpretation, usually observed in undergraduate students (Lea and Street, 1998). My research suggests that the postgraduate students also have similar experiences with undergraduate students. Some of the issues that surfaced during the participant observation related to the tenuous relationship between the workplace and university. For example, the conflict of knowledge between students located at the workplace and supervisors who have never had experience in the workplace. One possible recommendation is to have co-supervisors from the workplace so that they can assist the academic supervisors. It was striking to observe similarities between undergraduate students and postgraduate students when coming to the challenges of reading and writing. Perhaps, this is an indication that a lot of these can be addressed prior to the MTEch.

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